Title: An analysis of the Narratives of Omani Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

This is a study of 29 Omani women entrepreneurs' narratives in Oman. Entrepreneurship has been officially sanctioned as an activity since January 2013 in Oman; thus the concept of being an entrepreneur is still is very new. Based on my experience, I realised the way Omani women understand and practise entrepreneurship is quite different to the Western understanding of the concept. Indeed, more critical entrepreneurship research has recognised that the Western literature of entrepreneurship is inadequate to represent the experience of non-Western women entrepreneurs; and this research calls for more culturally relevant studies.

Therefore, this study takes a social constructionist narrative approach to exploring first, to explore how the concept of entrepreneurship is understood by these women; and second, to explore their practices and their understanding of the perceived contextual influences that shape their doings of entrepreneur-ing. Interviews with 29 women were carried out and analysed using narrative approach and the results supported the view that Western literature is inadequate to represent the experience of Omani women entrepreneurs. Key findings were that understandings of the concept of entrepreneurship are rather confused and contradictory; which reinforces the idea of newness. However, the newness seems to be in the term, but not the activity. Thus, entrepreneurship is perceived as equivalent to traditional home-business, which reinforces gender stereotypes; and although entrepreneurship is perceived as gender-neutral, it is not so in practice. Also, the perceived key contextual influences that are identified are: first, tribalism, which seems to overshadow gender and qualification; second, government interventions, which have shaped how entrepreneurship is practised; third, family, which evolves around the male relatives' involvement in women's entrepreneurship; and finally, religion/culture, which are embodied mainly in terms of fate and appearance (attire). The conclusions are: the areas that are identified in this study are mostly new insights and have not been recognised in the current mainstream Western literature, such as tribalism. Some areas contradict the Western studies, such as the notion of fatalism; while some areas are recognised in the current mainstream literature, such as family – but the way in which it plays out in Omani women entrepreneurs' experience differs from the Western women's entrepreneurship in the mainstream literature.

Declaration

I, Hadil Abdul Sahib Al-Moosa, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

An analysis of the Narratives of Omani Women Entrepreneurs

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have cited the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as indicated on page vii.

Name of candidate: Hadil Abdul Sahib Al-Moosa Signature:

Date: 08.03.2018

Dedication

To Lulu, Abood and Hassoni

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As with many long-term endeavours, this work owes much to the support and contributions of others. The research and writing has been challenging and exciting. The experience has been valuable and I have grown as a researcher, a woman and a human being.

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Publications

Book chapter

Al-Moosa, H. (Forthcoming) “Pleasing the Father”: The Impact of the Political Leadership in Shaping Women Entrepreneurship in Oman In: Yousafzi, S., Lindgreen, A., Saeed, S., & Henry, C. (eds.), *Contextual Embeddedness of Women's Entrepreneurship: Going beyond a Gender Neutral Approach*. London, UK: Routledge.

Conference papers

Al-Moosa, H. (2015) Entrepreneurship as a career choice for women in Oman: The role of Gender, Islam and Social Identity. Paper submitted at The Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) ‘Confreat’ (conference and research retreat) Leeds, UK 15–16th July, 2015.

Al-Moosa, H. (2015) Women Entrepreneurial Career in the Arabian Gulf: “home” for the “homeless”. Paper presented at The 33rd Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) ‘Home’ Nottingham, UK 11–14 July, 2015.

Al-Moosa, H. (2017) Veiling or Unveiling: or in between? Arab Muslim Omani women entrepreneurs’ public appearance. Paper presented at the 35th Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) ‘Carne – Flesh and organization’ Rome, Italy 10–13th July, 2017.

Al-Moosa, H. (2017) Women’s Entrepreneurship in Oman. Paper presented at The 10th International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference ‘Time for another revolution’ Liverpool, UK 3–5 July, 2017.

We are continuing on this path, God willing as we are, that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women because no doubt it resembles the bird in relying on both its wings to fly high on the horizons of the sky. How can this bird manage if one of its wings is broken? Will it be able to fly?

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, 17th Oct, 2009

Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

HM	His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Sultan of Oman
PASMED	Public Authority of Small and Medium Enterprise
OG	Official Gazette of the Sultanate of Oman
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University

Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores the ways in which Omani women entrepreneurs understand and narrativise their practice of entrepreneurship within the perceived contextual influences that shape them. The notion of entrepreneurship is considered new in the Arab world (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015). According to an Arab entrepreneur blogger, the word entrepreneurship does not exist in Arabic (thenextweb, 2011). Ennis (2013) highlights in her doctoral thesis that there is an Arabic version/translation of the term entrepreneurship. However, none of the existing studies on the Arab context has touched upon the issue of the way in which entrepreneurship is understood (e.g. Ennis, 2013), although this is acknowledged (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015).

In January 2013, I participated in the National Symposium of Small and Medium Enterprise Development in Oman. This symposium was called by the Sultan of Oman. The topics of the symposium are decided by His Majesty (HM) and are usually about current critical issues, such as employment. The issue of increasing youth unemployment is a national concern in Oman and was considered to be the main trigger for 2011 protests (Valeri, 2015). The main purpose of the 2013 symposium was to reduce the increasing youth unemployment through developing entrepreneurship and the SME sector (Al-Shanfari et al., 2013).

As a result of the National SME Symposium, the Public Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development (PASMED) – also known as Riyada – was established. An official category of entrepreneur was established in Oman, and this category is only offered for

Omanis. The main aim for PASMED as stated on their website is “to instil the culture of entrepreneurship” (Riyada, 2017).

During the symposium and the workshops that followed, I realised that there was confusion around what entrepreneurship is about. At some venues, entrepreneurship was associated with Steve Jobs. At others, entrepreneurship was associated with the Prophet Mohammed, which seemed contradictory. Although entrepreneurship is a Western concept, it is not controversial in Oman, unlike other Western notions, such as feminism (Saliba, 2000), which remain unwelcome in Arab Muslim societies (Golley, 2004). Gulf societies are usually hostile to new Western concepts unless they do not conflict with their culture (Omair, 2008). In my mind, this raised the question of how Omani people perceive and conceptualise entrepreneurship.

The official *SME Development Symposium Main Report* (2013) defined entrepreneurship as “the process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological, and social risks and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence” (Al-Shanfari et al., 2013, p.5); but this definition is nowhere to be found on PASMED’s website, nor in any published leaflets and news clips that have been distributed by PASMED.

Following HM’s intervention, from 2013 onwards, the Omani market has been bombarded with different support programmes for Omani entrepreneurship. The main support provider is the government, but other programmes have been offered by different parties (Ennis, 2015). Entrepreneurship support schemes are only offered to Omanis. Omani entrepreneurs

started to feature in mainstream and social media with strong publicity, visibility and attention.

Omani women became involved in entrepreneurship early on. Based on observation, there is a social acceptance of Omani women becoming entrepreneurs in spite of the conservative, patriarchal Omani culture and society; which for me, raised the question of why women's entrepreneurship is socially and culturally accepted, while journalism, for example – my background – remains a challenge for women.

Furthermore, Omani women entrepreneurs did not appear to me entrepreneurial in the Western sense. Neither did the support programmes offered by the government sound entrepreneurial. Javillouar and Peters (1973) describe the propagated entrepreneurial culture as one in which independence, risk-taking and innovation are encouraged, whereas in Omani culture these values are not highly regarded (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Al-Mataani, 2017). But entrepreneurship is an official category, and Omanis are called entrepreneurs by registering.

Intrigued by this apparent paradox, I decided to explore the ways in which Omani women entrepreneurs understand and practise entrepreneurship in my thesis through the narratives they share. I decided to explore Omani women's narratives about their understandings of the notion, and how they practise entrepreneurship within the perceived contextual influences that shape them.

This chapter aims to set the grounds for this thesis; it highlights the key and important aspects that shaped it. Thus, the structure of this chapter starts off with an overview of the field which serves as a background for this study, followed by the theoretical underpinning that shaped

the grounds and guided my study, which has also formed the research questions and objectives that are presented in the followed section. I then turn to how this study was conducted in the fifth section; followed by the research strategy, in which I introduce myself. Then, the knowledge contribution this study makes. Finally, I lay out the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Research overview

Despite the increasing spread of the entrepreneurship concept worldwide, basic understanding of the notion seems to be problematic (Ogbor, 2000). Entrepreneurship has been promoted in 'mainstream research' and 'global media' as a universal, static and fixed concept (Hamilton, 2013) that is associated mainly with innovation (Schumpeter, 1934, cited in Ahl, 2006, p. 4), risk taking (Cantillon, early 1700s, cited in Ahl, 2006, p. 4), opportunity seizing and wealth creation (Venkataraman, 1997), which lead to economic growth of any nation (Ennis, 2015). Recently, critical scholars in entrepreneurship research, question and challenge these normative assumptions, e.g. Ogbor (2000), Calas et al. (2009) and Essers (2009), resulting in problematizing our understanding about what constitutes the notion of entrepreneurship (Alvarez et al., 2013). Thus, the problem seems to be on the conceptual level (Ogbor, 2000).

Furthermore, contemporary feminist scholars such as Ahl (2006) argues that the early research in entrepreneurship theory was written by white male thinkers and represents capitalist Western economy, individualistic culture and the experience of white middle-class men. Similarly, the research ideology underpinning the early studies has been guided by objectivist epistemology and positivist methodological approaches that have privileged certain perspectives (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Essers et al., 2010). As a result, the early

studies of developing entrepreneurship theory neglected any other possible perspectives, and marginalised other non-Western contexts, different cultures and other groups, such as race, gender and ethnicity (Mirchandani, 1999; Ogbor, 2000; Dhaliwal and Kangis, 2006).

Women are one of the groups that historically were excluded from formal research in the early studies of entrepreneurship literature (Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009), which does not suggest that there were no women entrepreneurs, but that they were not included in the entrepreneurship literature until recently (Ahl, 2004).

Women's entrepreneurship has entered the field of entrepreneurship fairly recently and became a field of its own by the 1990s (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). However, Ahl (2006), among others, suggests that women were researched based on established concepts and categories in the field of entrepreneurship, which were initially developed on/by white male experience. Also, studying women's entrepreneurship focused on certain topics within primarily economic disciplines such as performance, growth and success; and women entrepreneurs were measured and tested against the established normative standards which are developed based on white men's entrepreneurship; this has mainly resulted in comparative studies. Consequently, these studies tend to depict women entrepreneurs as an underperforming group in comparison to their male counterparts, and studies suggested prescriptions, models and strategies to capitalise on women entrepreneurs' capabilities in order to achieve the standard criteria of entrepreneurship. Thus, critical and feminist scholars on women's entrepreneurship demonstrate that women entrepreneurs' experience has been circumscribed by the experience of men entrepreneurs' in entrepreneurship theory and practice (Mirchandani, 1999; Marlow and Patton, 2005; Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Also,

feminist scholars such as Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013) argue that entrernereship might play different roles in women's lives and therefore should not be tied merely to economic role.

Also, feminist scholars such as Mirchandani (1999) have raised critiques that women entrepreneurship studies have ignored issues of colour, ethnicity and race; and they have treated women as one homogeneous group has the same concerns. Writers from feminist, postcolonial and postmodernist traditions, whilst approaching women's entrepreneurship in slightly different ways, nonetheless all share an understanding of women as a heterogeneous group (e.g. Mirchandani, 1999; Marlow and Patton, 2005).

Within the same line of thinking, Javillonar and Peters (1973), among others, suggest that when researchers into entrepreneurship in non-Western countries have adopted the more universalist approach, the consequnce has been that these non-Western countries have then been seen as 'less entreprenurial'. Scholars in critical entrepreneurship suggest that individuals from non-Western cultures might perceive and practise entrepreneurship differently (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). The universalist entrepreneurship theory holds and promotes the values of individualistic culture, leaving no room for collectivistic cultures to thrive within entrepreneurship (Javillonar and Peters, 1973; Pathak et al., 2013).

Critical scholars in entrepreneurship research argue that entrepreneurship should be treated as a social construct that is culturally made and socially constructed. The turn to social constructionism in entrepreneurship studies has changed the way knowledge is perceived, approached, produced and constructed (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Steyaert, 2007). The implications are epistemological, theoretical and methodological (Fletcher, 2007;

Steyaert, 2007). The traditional approaches are limited and constrained, and lack flexibility for new horizons, insights and perspectives to emerge (Calas et al., 2009). It limits research from exploring the uniqueness of the notion and the nuanced experience of entrepreneurship (Calas et al., 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010, 2013; Galloway et al., 2015), especially in researching new group in a new context, where their experience needs to be included on the conceptual and theorising level (De Bruin et al., 2007; Calas et al., 2009; Galloway et al., 2015).

1.3 Theoretical underpinning

Inspired by postmodern thoughts and shaped by social constructionism ideas, I have developed a research lens that has shaped my thinking and guided me throughout this study, starting off with the literature I have reviewed, and then formulating the research questions and objectives, including the choices I have made regarding methodological stance and data collecting methods, and ending with interpreting, presenting and discussing my results. Therefore, I have located the theoretical underpinning at the very beginning of my thesis in order to reveal for the reader my intellectual and theoretical positions which have shaped the unfolding process of this thesis.

Postmodernism is an intellectual tradition that rejects the idea of universality of knowledge and truth (Agger, 1991; Kvale, 1996). It is a critical stance towards the certainty of issues claimed in mainstream research and theories (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Postmodern tradition argues that scientific knowledge and the so-called scientific mode of knowing represents a Eurocentric perspective of knowing which privileged a certain and singular voice. This in turn has marginalised other voices and other possible perspectives in the early research. This absolute knowledge is propagated as grand/meta narratives that are promoted as universal truth (Prasad, 2005).

The scientific methods that are used to investigate human endeavours in the early research are considered as the legitimate mode of knowing, and the outcomes are considered as ultimate and universal truth. The scientific mode of knowing has been widely propagated as the credible methods that validate the knowledge produced (Ogbor, 2000). Postmodern scholars argue that this validated and legitimised knowledge has systematically privileged Western supremacy and silenced other voices, groups and cultures, and other possible ways of knowing (e.g. Calas and Smircich, 1999; Ogbor, 2000; Prasad, 2005), which raises concerns of representation and truth claims in knowledge and research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000).

Therefore, postmodern tradition is in favour of pluralism, fragmentation and indeterminacy (Prasad, 2005). Postmodern scholars argue that the world consists of local narratives that stem from the subjective positions of the individual and plural social groups. Thus, all knowledge is perspectival and contextual within the history and the culture of a given society (Agger, 1991; Kvale, 1996). In essence, every society or culture might have their own narrative that is internally shared, and shapes the fundamental aspiration of each society (Lemert, 1997, cited in Prasad, 2005, p. 220). Therefore, narratives are culturally shared stories that are local and cannot be universal. In this regard, postmodernism advocates the idea of re-narrativisation of local stories within their historical, cultural and social realms (Kvale, 1996), where narrative knowledge is embodied through local stories (Lyotard, 1984, cited in Kvale, 1996). These local stories are socially constructed within the local cultural meanings and social relations (Kvale, 1996).

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective and an epistemology; in the latter, it determines the philosophical underpinning assumptions in knowledge production that guide the methodological approach of a study (Lincoln et al., 2011). In this section, the discussion

presents social constructionism as a theoretical perspective which serves as the theoretical underpinning of the concepts researched in this study.

Social constructionism is an anti-essentialist perspective. The essentialist perspective defines notions as fixed, stable and unchangeable; while the anti-essentialist is a perspective treating any given notion as a fluid, on-going process that takes different shapes in a given time and space (Carter and Bolden, 2012). Traditionally, the majority of research and organisations has taken this more universalist/essentialist approach, where any given notion is featured as definite and with clear boundaries, and promoted as absolute and universal (Burr, 2003). The anti-essentialist perspective challenges taken-for-granted assumptions in research, and problematizes the idea of fixed notions that are context-free (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Thus, the social constructionism perspective shifts our thinking from perceiving knowledge and notions as discrete and absolute to fluid concepts that are perspectival and contextual (Steyaert, 1997, 2007).

The basic assumptions of the social constructionist perspective are premised on the idea of multiple realities. The social constructionism perspective rejects the idea of an objective reality that is isolated from the individuals living it, and advocates the idea of multiple realities for individuals: each shapes and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions and practices (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 2001; Burr, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008).

Under this perspective, knowledge is a cultural process of meaning making (Stead, 2004). Hence, knowledge is constructed through interaction, cultural practices and social relations (Fletcher, 2007). Therefore, knowledge and action go together (Burr, 2003; Young and Collin,

2004) and meanings of concepts and practices are always in a state of interpretation and negotiation (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Kvale, 1996).

This perspective falls under the socio-cultural strand of social constructionism, where meanings are culturally constructed and manifested in the practices performed by individuals sharing the same social reality (Lock and Strong, 2010). Meanings are explored through understanding the social interaction and cultural practices that constitute social norms and uphold social order in a given society.

Language also plays a crucial role in this social construction process of meaning making; it is considered as a practice that reflects and constructs individuals' realities (Burr, 2003). The linguistic resources available to individuals enable or hinder them to construct meanings and create realities/horizons (Hunt and Sampson, 2006). Also, the way individuals use language is considered as a social activity, which represents and constructs the meanings in the social world they live in (Burr, 2003; Lock and Strong, 2010).

Thus, what are considered as entrepreneurial practices are rather cultural and social, where it derives its meaning from the social institutions in a society, such as family, school and media, that make sense within the context where they occur (Steyaert, 1997). The context that shape the meanings and the practices are then extremely significant from a social constructionist perspective (Lock and Strong, 2010).

Against this background; the theoretical framework I have adopted for this study is based on the following points: first, rejecting the idea of universality of any given knowledge; second, all knowledge is local and socially constructed within a given context; third, concepts are fluid and change over time and are tied to a specific time and space; fourth, concepts are culturally

constructed and socially made by locally shared narratives; fifth, meanings are explored through subjective interpretation of notions and practices; sixth, context shape meanings and social practices that can be understood through cultural subjective lens; and seventh, all knowledge is perspectival and contextual (Kvale, 1996; Prasad, 2005).

1.4. Thesis aim, research questions and objectives

The overall aim is to explore the narratives of Omani women's entrepreneurs about the meanings and their understanding of practices within the perceived contextual influences that shape those practices. In order to achieve the aim set, this study adopted a social constructionism narrative approach to answer the following questions:

1. How do Omani women conceptualise entrepreneurship?

2. How do Omani women narrativise their entrepreneurial practices and what do these narratives suggest about the ways they understand and make sense of the context in which they work?

Thus, I divide my study in two parts; the first part of the study, I intend to explore the meanings and the associations ascribed to the notion from the perspective of 29 Omani women entrepreneurs, who are currently involved in the act of entrepreneurship. These women are considered among the first official group of Omani women entrepreneurs.

While in the second part, I intend to explore how women understand their practices within the perceived contextual influences that shape them in their narratives. In other words, I explore women's narratives about their socially constructed practices that are described and interpreted in light of the perceived contextual influences that shape them. Their narratives

which draw on a wider social and cultural practices, which also socially construct meanings about gender, context and entrepreneurship.

In order to achieve the research aim and questions, I have set out these objectives:

1. To identify the meanings/associations that Omani women ascribe to the notion of entrepreneurship,
2. To identify the perceived key contextual influences that shape the practices of entrepreneurship,
3. To contribute to the body of knowledge of women's entrepreneurship conceptualisation in theory, research and practice.

1.5 Research design

Guided by the theoretical underpinning of this study, this thesis adopts narrative inquiry to achieve the overall aim, answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this thesis. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative study that is recommended to explore local narratives of a lived experience of an under-researched group and a new context. Many reasons made me chose narrative inquiry. First, narrative inquiry advocates pluralism, and explores how local narratives shape people's stories (Kvale, 1996). Second, the narrative mode of knowing situates any knowledge within its wider context in a story form; where there are past events that constitute the current moment and lead to the future; therefore, it captures the historical period, space and relations with the surroundings (Chase, 2005). Third, narrative inquiry gives an active role to the participants to engage in interpretation and chose the significant of issues in their lives (Polkinghorne, 2007). Fourth and most importantly, narrative inquiry acknowledges the role of the researcher in the research process and the knowledge produced (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Thus, the knowledge claimed here is subjective and produced through co-construction between myself and the participants. Therefore, integrating reflexivity is recommended with narrative inquiry and postmodern traditions (Borer and Fontana, 2012)**.** Therefore, I introduce myself through a reflexive lens in the following section to acknowledge what I think might have been my impact on the how this study is conducted and produced.

The research process is conducted in an iterative process, and is driven by its results. Therefore, the final piece of this thesis is written retrospectively. Two main challenges are faced throughout writing this thesis; first, how my data makes sense to me as an insider/outsider: insider in the sense of being Omani woman, and outsider in the sense of studying and writing in the West. And second, how will it make sense to my audience as Westerners.

Narrative inquiry and reflexivity change who we are throughout the research process (Chase, 2005, 2011). They raise our awareness of our own cultural preconceptions constructionism (Borer and Fontana, 2012). The knowledge I have gained throughout the course of this project has changed how I think, evaluate and examine reality, taken-for-granted assumptions and knowledge towards myself, my own context and the world. Thus, doing this type of research and writing a piece of this kind was a challenging experience; and I consider it a life-changing experience.

1.6 Reflexivity

A social constructionist study sees all knowledge as situated (Burr, 2003; Berger, 2015); therefore the researcher is invited to integrate reflexivity into the study as a way of demonstrating how their particular perspective has shaped the research design throughout

(Shaw, 2010). As such, all knowledge represents certain situated knowledge and in relation to time and place, and the researcher (Berger, 2015).

Reflexivity stems from the idea that every study is subjective and not detached from the researcher. These subjectivities are acknowledged, and their influences on the study are made explicit (Shaw, 2010). Thus, the outcomes of any study depend on the researcher's social position, standpoint, perspective, experience, beliefs, interest and relationships (Finlay, 2002). The outcome of a study is a result of the researcher's representation of the world (Shaw, 2010).

Reflexivity is defined as the ability of the researcher to acknowledge how their own social position, experiences, beliefs and the context have influenced and shaped the process and the outcome of the study (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Reflexivity is commonly viewed as a critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality and acknowledges explicitly how this position may have influenced the study (Berger, 2015). In essence, the researcher acknowledges how they think their own situated knowledge has impacted the study (Shaw, 2010).

Thus, through reflexivity, the research opens up new possibilities of understanding how a given knowledge came about through acknowledging the researcher role in the knowledge creation process (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity facilitates the researcher's sensitivity to acknowledge and monitor how their own perspective, biases and experiences have impacted the study (Shaw, 2010); it increases the researcher's self-consciousness and awareness of their influence on the research process, participants, analysis and interpretation (Andrews et al., 2013).

In this regard, reflexivity turns the researcher's thinking back to oneself (Shaw, 2010). The emphasis is placed on self-examination of presuppositions and pre-understanding of the researcher and the present research process. Thus, it is rather a self-exploration and self-awareness; it increases the researcher's sensitivity and enhances better understanding of the role of self in the study process and outcome (Shaw, 2010). Therefore, it requires self-monitoring throughout the research process, starting off the initial interest, literature reviewed, methods, data collection and interpretations (Berger, 2015).

By making reflexive knowledge explicit, reflexive study offers transparency: the how's and why's and the sense of the knowledge produced. By doing so, reflexivity is used to claim the quality, integrity and the trustworthiness of the qualitative study (Polkinghorne, 2007; Finlay, 2002). It is considered as a major strategy for quality control in qualitative study (Berger, 2015).

Applying a reflexive lens requires developing the ability of self-critiquing, self-examination, self-monitoring and evaluation on and at every step taken and choice made throughout the study (Essers, 2009). Reflexivity is rather challenging when studying one's own culture, probably with large blind spots. Self-examination is a challenge that requires courage, effort and iterative processes, to unpack one's own blind-spots, prejudices and own influences (Shaw, 2010). It takes a good deal of practice and more practice to develop the ability of reflexive thinking, skill and lens (Lam et al., 2006).

With practice, and as time went by, I found myself becoming more skilled in – relatively – developing a reflexive lens. As an insider in some aspects (belonging to the same culture and group but not having shared the experience) and as an outsider in others (living abroad and

being exposed to Western education, British culture and working in a cosmopolitan society), reflexivity became an opportunity that enabled me to see, sense and unpack the nuances in my own culture, my own up-bringing and my own social constructionism. It also allowed me to monitor my own thinking process, thoughts, words, reasoning, points of references, behaviour, practices and my relation and interaction with the world around me (Shaw, 2010). It increased my sensitivity to how my influences and position may have influenced and shaped my research process and outcomes (Berger, 2015). By doing so, I do claim that I am aware – to large extent – of my own cultural background and experience and how that may have influenced my study, these also serving as a source of knowledge in conducting and interpreting this study (Shaw, 2010; Berger, 2015).

Hence, getting involved in and engaged with the Western literature alongside living abroad in multi-cultural country enabled me to develop – relatively – cultural sensitivity. I became more sensitive to spotting and unpacking the differences and nuances across cultures, which allowed me – to a certain extent – to compare and contrast with my own culture and background.

Developing a reflexive lens requires time, effort and practice; I have practised throughout the course of this PhD through keeping a research diary and learning how to write thoughts, feelings and comments throughout. Also, working in the UK, travelling between my country and the UK, and other countries (mostly Europe) through the course of my PhD, has sharpened – to a certain extent – my reflexive lens and cultural sensitivity.

In this chapter, I use reflexivity in relation to my position and my understanding at the start of the inquiry, which is recommended (Shaw, 2010). More details related to other aspects of

the thesis such as data collection and analysis are offered in the methodology chapter. In the following section, I introduce myself, to demonstrate my understanding and influences and how I think my position has shaped this study.

1.6.1 Background

I come from a middle-class, educated family from an ethnic group that is considered a non-Arab Shi'a tribe living in Muscat, according to the resources I reviewed for this study[1]. Historically, my tribe works in business and values education. Formal education started in Oman during the 1970s; my parents are amongst the first educated Omanis. I would consider my upbringing religious and conservative, which I believe has framed my initial thinking. Meaning, my frames of thinking used to oscillate between religious thoughts and cultural meanings. In a later stage of my life, my experiences have shaped my thinking in relation to my cultural background. My experience became my main point of reference in making sense of life.

However, my family's conservativism level follows the tribe level, which in comparison to Omani tribes is considered moderate or maybe even liberal (the issue of tribes is touched upon in the context chapter). Thus, the possibilities and the opportunities I believe I had were quite different from other Omani women. I was born as a twin with a brother; and my up-bringing included the cultural stereotyping of gender differences in choices, options and possibilities; which I think created the first seeds of my rebelliousness against gender stereotyping.

[1] Locally, there are many debates about the origins of my tribe, and whether we are considered Arab Omanis or nomads who settled in Oman for trading purposes. The issues of origins create tension in Oman, and are therefore it is a sensitive issue.

I was married and had my first child before entering my undergraduate studies, which in turn made me fulfil my traditional gender role at an early stage; and which also made me focus on my studies and career, otherwise my social status would have been a concern and social pressure (Fakhro, 2005).

I obtained my Bachelor's degree at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 2003. I studied media/mass communication, with TV and radio production as a major and tourism as a minor. I was the only female amongst thirty males in my specialisation. Oman is a sex-segregated society. The first encounter between sexes is usually at the university level, then in the labour market (Al-Azri, 2013). The segregation code between genders at SQU is strict: women have their own corridors, own cafeteria and own doors. Even in classrooms, men sit at the front rows and we sit at the back. Interestingly, this is considered a mixed space.

With the support of my father, I was able to study media, which is not welcomed socially. It requires a high level of mixing with men, long and late working hours, and high publicity; which is not very acceptable for a respected Arab woman. In the Arab Gulf countries, a woman represents her family and tribe (Aldosari, 2016). As mentioned, my tribe is not considered very conservative, as we mix with our male cousins from an early age and on different social occasions. Also, not all women are covered in black (Abaya) or wear Hijab. My tribe has relatively fewer restrictions on women, in comparison with other Omani tribes. Most of the new generation receive Western education, and most of the big businesses in Oman are owned by members of my tribe (Valeri, 2015). The level of exposure and openness can be considered high among my tribe members in comparison to the other Omani tribes. Women from my tribe have joined the labour market and have been in the public space from the beginning of the 1970s.

Reflecting on this, in retrospect, I would say I was non-conformist in my education and career choices, as shown below. I pursued my interest despite my sex. In hindsight, I do see myself stretching within the cultural lines through fulfilling my social role and through ensuring my father's support. At this stage, and while doing this study, questions such as why did I need my father's support, do I always need my father's or some authoritative male figure's support, what if I did not have one, what would my condition have been?

Also, and as shown below, I was the only female in different phases of my life, starting off at university and then workplace. The idea of being the only one did not bother me: I saw it as that women did not insist on their interests and played their traditional social role most likely by choice. I did not see that I was privileged by my tribe and father. At that age, I believed that gender issues were not very major in Oman due to our publically propagated given rights discourse in comparison to our Arab women counterparts. Analysing my thoughts, I guess I was firstly influenced by the public-government discourse on women's right and women's position under the patronage of His Majesty. Secondly, my up-bringing was more flexible than my other Omani women counterparts – relatively. Thirdly, my level of exposure was very limited, and was mainly local.

During my undergraduate studies, I was focused on my career and goals. Therefore I did not pay attention to why was I the only woman in these situations. Hence, being the only one felt like a responsibility in terms of my father's reputation. Also, I became – somehow – a representation of Omani woman, which was a source of pride, and again, responsibility. I felt that I could encourage women by taking the lead in these male-dominated fields. Thus, I was cautious and played along with my culture's lines in some aspects, such as attire, utterance, behaviour in public spaces and the boundaries of contacting men, and so on. However, as

there were almost no women in my early experience, I did not have another's experience to compare myself against; I relied on creating my own boundaries based on observation and cultural repertoire/sensitivity. Thus, I started paying attention to my surroundings during my early career. As I was a media personality who needed to be sensitive and developing a deeper understanding to my surroundings and between the lines nuances in my own culture. In this regard, I started to modify my attire to fit expectations and be more accepted, and to keep the balance between my individual choices (education, career and personal) and social acceptance.

By writing this study retrospectively, and developing a reflexive sense, I realised that I had chosen women as a group initially because of my cultural background, and then for pragmatic reasons. The strict cultural and social codes on gender relations in a sex-segregated society have shaped my behaviour subconsciously. There are challenges to bring men's voices into the study. Issues such as contacting men, meeting them alone, the location and time, my appearance and other concerns that put pressure on me as a single/divorced Omani woman. By doing so, I realised I was practising the appropriate cultural gender practices as an Omani woman. However, I realised also that I have access to the private spaces of Omani women as an insider. I also have the cultural sensitivity that allowed me to establish a rapport with my participants whether they are from the interior or Muscat. As an Omani woman, I have no social restrictions on interviewing women but I have a lot of challenges in including men. I consider this as part of my social constructionism that made me decide on the group approach before becoming interested in women and gender studies in entrepreneurship. However, getting into gender studies triggered my own experience in professional, social and personal

realms as a source for knowledge to relate, connect, compare and contrast, and eventually conduct this study and write this thesis.

1.6.2 Work

I started to work while I was an undergraduate at SQU, which is not the norm in Oman[2]. At that stage, my motive was merely economic; and I guess I was navigating my opportunities. I joined local radio news at the national station as a reporter in 1999. The job was a part-time contract, when part-time jobs did were not regulated in the Omani labour market; this only started in 2015 (Ministerial Decision No. 102/2015). I also worked as a part-time national news anchor with Omani national TV and radio. From that period, I believed and still believe that the Omani labour market is in a developing phase, which allows flexibility, navigating new ways and stretching the existing one. Looking back to my choices, I question the opportunities I had: was it because I was the only woman, was it because I was different as an Omani, or both; was I supported only because of HM's support for women, and that most of the places I worked in needed to have women's representation. Whatever might have applied, my experience helped me to create my own path and navigate my society in different ways.

After graduating in 2003, I joined the Ministry of Manpower as an information specialist, I was promoted to run the radio and TV department, then finally as a Director of International Organisation and External Relations at the Minister's office and started working with international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Arab Labour Organisation (ALO). Also, I was a government delegate in Omani-Moroccan and

[2] As students, we usually live on our family's finances until finishing studies or getting married.

Omani–Iranian bilateral committees. And again, I was the only woman. This experience gave me a glimpse on how we – as the Omani government and society – are viewed internationally. After living abroad, questions such as representation and tokenism started to come to mind: was I selected to enhance the international image of modern Oman; was I selected because – again – I was the only one who was privileged; what did my presence do to the delegation; and what impression did it give to the international community, or to Omani society, and to women more specifically?

In 2005, I had a TV show which focused on Omanisation and labour market issues. I was also a columnist in a local newspaper, where I used to tackle issues of work in relation to our social lives. Although this column was part of my job, it did allow me access to the lives of my fellow Omanis in relation to work, irrespective of gender, social position and geographical location.

Then, I moved into the academic field as a lecturer in Human Resources Management in 2007, and Entrepreneurship in 2013. I made this decision to pursue my PhD as scholarships are only offered for academics. I wanted to work and move to the ILO in Geneva, and I had to understand and learn how to research to do so. My first encounter with Omani women as colleagues was in the academic field. However, based on my previous experience, where I had mingled with Omanis from all walks of life for work-related issues, I developed a cultural repertoire/sensitivity that made me alter and modify my behaviour according to the context. Attire played a huge role: the way I dressed changed how Omanis from the interior and Muscat interacted with me. In hindsight, I wanted to be socially accepted and related to, however without losing my individuality.

Then, since 2011, I started working as a freelancer in Oman[3]. I worked as a freelancer in a local consultancy company[4]. And again, freelance is a new concept, and I tried it mainly for economic reasons. Working with this company allowed me to experience the business side of the labour market. Also, it gave a sense of what it feels to take risk and live on an unstable income, as I took un-paid leave to freelance despite my financial commitments –as a single mother with children. Through this company, I worked on national projects such as the SME symposium (2013), which was under HM's patronage. But this was not my first experience in working with HM's symposiums; I worked in another two during my period at the Ministry of Manpower; however, I was on the government side. Thus, my work experience made me visit rural and remote areas in Oman and work with Omanis from different tribes and ethnic groups; it increased my cultural awareness of the nuances of Omani culture. I would claim that I understand the different areas' local accents, proverbs and jokes. At the other end of the spectrum, working with the Omani authority allowed me to understand – to a certain extent – how labour issues are tackled from the governmental perspective. Additionally, working in the media and being a columnist for a while in a local newspaper gave me a fair level of exposure and visibility.

1.6.3 Relating to Omani women as a researcher

The number of Omani women in the public space is increasing, although still limited. Meaning, we are very visible in a male-dominated society. Therefore, as Omani women in the public space, we either know each other, or know of each other; which in turn makes the possibility of me knowing/of participants high, and vice versa.

[3] Freelancer is a new concept that is just starting to be used but is not yet regulated.
[4] The membership of the Council is appointed by HM.

Because of my media background, and holding multiple jobs throughout my career, people are not quite certain of what I do or what my profession is; which I suppose is an advantage as my participants could not position me in one category, which reduces constraints on their talk during the interview; however, I felt that they categorised me based on sex, and on my tribe.

In terms of my appearance, as segregation is the norm in Oman (Al-Azri, 2013), women's appearance is very visible and sensitive. I do wear Hijab in the cultural way. I do not wear Abaya (the black dress) which is the dress code in Gulf societies (Omair, 2009). I wear coloured outfits, with long skirts and long sleeves, and a headscarf that covers most of the hair. In the Omani sense, my outfit is considered modest and cultural but not religious. However, during my fieldwork, I started wearing the black Abaya. I felt that this appearance, which is the norm, made me gain my participants' rapport and that they could relate to me as an Omani woman who they could share their experience with.

1.6.4 The topic

As mentioned, my first encounter with the topic was through my involvement in the SME development symposium in January 2013.

I realised that only certain kinds of women tend to take up entrepreneurship. Those women entrepreneurs are encouraged by the government and given strong publicity. The number of women as entrepreneurs has increased in the public space. Based on observation, these women had similar characters, and certain types of businesses. However, those women did not sound 'entrepreneurial' in my naïve understanding of entrepreneurship. Given that I am exposed to the Western media, my understanding revolved around individuality, risk-taking

and innovation, being more inclined into breaking norms and creating new things. Examples such as Steve Jobs and Richard Branson spring to my mind when mentioning the term entrepreneur. Contrary to my 'western version' of entrepreneurship, I did not sense any risk taking, innovation or individuality among my fellow women Omani entrepreneurs. In contrast, there is heavy involvement of family, perpetuating traditional women's businesses and enhancing sex-segregation. From the government side, it seemed to me that women are pushed away from the labour market to more controlled – by family – spaces of entrepreneurship; this made me wonder what exactly is happening and what women entrepreneurs are doing; what do Omanis understand by the term 'entrepreneurship'? Maybe subconsciously I wanted to become an entrepreneur, but could not see myself fitting into the Omani sense of entrepreneurship as I observed it, and perhaps this is my main motive for this study. Also, the idea that entrepreneurship is socially welcomed made me speculate what entrepreneurship in Oman is about; as new concepts are not usually welcomed unless they align with local culture in Gulf societies (Omair, 2008).

As I became more familiar with the Western literature of entrepreneurship theory and practice, I became more convinced that entrepreneurship as promoted in the literature and propagated in global media is not adequate to represent the experience of Omani entrepreneurship.

I wanted to explore the meanings of the notion, but not only by what people understand of it, but also how they practise it, and why. I wanted to understand family involvement in practice, losing individuality, increasing sex-segregation and so on. These concerns guided my search in reviewing the classic and the contemporary critical perspectives of

entrepreneurship, and in choosing the intellectual tradition and theoretical perspectives that have framed my thinking and my study.

1.7 Research contribution

I see my research located within the increasing body of critical entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Essers and Benschop, 2009; Essers, 2009; Essers et al., 2010; Verduijn and Essers, 2013) and fitting into contemporary entrepreneurship studies by theorising through localising and contextualising entrepreneurship knowledge (e.g. Steyaert, 1997; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Fletcher, 2007).

Overall, the empirical results of this study support the claims made in critical entrepreneurship studies that classic entrepreneurship theory in the literature is inadequate to represent the experience of Omani women entrepreneurs; and therefore I support the recommendations made by critical entrepreneurship scholars in their call for adapting more flexible and creative theoretical and methodological approaches that enable the researcher to explore new and different insights that might emerge from the field, and also support the use of reflexivity that equips the researcher with sensibility and awareness to unpack nuanced knowledge in different contexts.

The results of this study have contributed to knowledge in three main ways; first, the results demonstrate that entrepreneurship means different things to different people (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008), and advocates that entrepreneurship is a social construct that is context-specific (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Marlow and Patton, 2005) and framed/ consistued by local narratives that shape meanings and practices (Kvale, 1996). Some of the results challenge fundamentally the basic assumptions of classic entrepreneurship theory such as the

idea of fate. Second, some of the results highlight areas that are not recognised in women's entrepreneurship literature, nor in the limited studies on Arab women's entrepreneurs (e.g. Erogul and McCrohan, 2008; Madichie and Gallant, 2012) such as tribalism. Third and finally, some the results address recognised themes in the literature and critical women entrepreneurship studies, but the ways in which they play out in Omani women entrepreneurs' lives differ from the ways they play out in elsewhere in Western and Muslim women's experience, such as family. The nuanced knowledge that is brought to the fore in this thesis contributes to the understanding of women's entrepreneurship experience in general, and Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs' experience in a Muslim Arab country more specifically.

I contribute to critical entrepreneurship studies. I have been particularly influenced by the work of Essers (2009) whose studies included the experience of minority, migrant Muslim women of Moroccan and Turkish descent living in the Netherlands, focusing on entrepreneurial practices in relation to gender, ethnic and Islamic identities. With regard to these topics, my thesis brings to the fore different entrepreneurial practices that embody cultural and social issues specific to the Omani context, such as tribalism and family that are culturally relevant, which are the nuanced indictors of differences between Muslim communities. Both samples are Muslim communities; however, the role of local culture, the context (Muslim/home country vs. Western/host country) and the interpretation and practice of Islam are significantly different. My thesis supports the point of view about how the interpretation of Islam differs between Muslim communities/cultures and cannot be tied to one Islam or culture (Smith, 1980; Bernard, 1994; Omair, 2008).

Also, my thesis supports that women's understanding of entrepreneurship and their entrepreneurial practices are cultural, situational and contextual (Essers, 2009). And despite that women's issues in the Arab world being considered similar in most of the literature (e.g. Sidani, 2016), which might be in certain aspects of Arab women's lives; however, my thesis claim that Arab/Muslim women do not share the same issues in entrepreneurship specifically, and their entrepreneurial practices are shaped by different influences such as their local culture, socio-economic conditions, economy of the country and perhaps, mainly country politics (e.g. Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010).

I also contribute to contemporary studies of entrepreneurship by theorising through localising knowledge, (e.g. Steyaert, 1997; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003) my results demonstrate that entrepreneurship is associated with connotations that are context-specific and have not been acknowledged in entrepreneurship literature. Although the meanings of entrepreneurship are rather confused among my participants, which proves the newness of the concept (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015), the connotations that are mentioned differ fundamentally from the Western associations of entrepreneurship. In this regard, one of the main contributions is the linguistic resources that are available to individuals (e.g. Steyaert, 1997, 2007). The Arabic version of the term entrepreneurship is associated with areas of leadership and pioneering; which in turn guided – to a large extent – how entrepreneurship is perceived locally. In this regard, my thesis adds to the conceptual and theorising level of knowledge in entrepreneurship studies.

As an insider and outsider in certain aspects, I bring my voice and the indigenous voices of my fellow Omani women entrepreneurs to the foreground of the Western academic arena. I advocate the importance of bringing indigenous voices to understand different points of view

and how things and meanings are constructed locally. By doing so, I claim that through research we can internationally bridge – to a certain extent – the conceptual gap by celebrating local voices and appreciating our differences.

1.8 Thesis structure

This thesis is structured over seven chapters. In this chapter, I have introduced myself and my motives for conducting this study, and laid out the theoretical underpinning that shaped my thinking and guided me. I have also outlined here the research aim, questions and objectives. I have also introduced briefly the study design, presenting the methodological approach applied. Then, I situated this study within a wider body of knowledge on critical entrepreneurship studies and contemporary views on entrepreneurship theory and practice; and finally, I put forward the claims I make to knowledge contribution.

In chapter two, I present the context of this study. I offer the cultural setting, the political system, culture and society, and the labour market in Oman, which I claim have shaped the notion of women's entrepreneurship in Oman. This chapter outlines the context to the reader, and also serves as a foundation to locate and discuss the results and the discussion offered in chapters five and six.

With the context in mind, I then turned to the literature on women's entrepreneurship in chapter three. I have reviewed the classic and mainstream studies of entrepreneurship, critical entrepreneurship and contemporary views, and finally, I review what is written about Arab Muslim women in entrepreneurship. Guided by my theoretical underpinning, I present how women's entrepreneurship is framed, promoted and discussed. In this chapter, I also highlight the problems with the classic theory of entrepreneurship in the mainstream

literature. Following the issues raised by critical entrepreneurship scholars, I support the need to study women's entrepreneurship with alternative, non-traditional and more creative approaches. Then, I expand more in detail the theoretical approach I have adopted. To support these claims, the very same review also highlights some key issues that have been missed in the current limited studies on Arab women, and more specifically Omani women. The final section draws the main themes that serve as a foundation for the arguments presented in this thesis.

In chapter four, I present how I conducted my research. I discuss the intellectual tradition and the epistemological stance of this study. This offers the background to the choices I made for methods used to collect and analyse my data. In explaining the reasons for my choices, I discuss the need for reflexivity in my kind of study with further details. I also discuss the pilot and the changes I made throughout the fieldwork. Finally, I offer the process of data analysis I have used in this study.

Then, I devote chapter five to present my results. Based on the two research questions; the presentation of my results follows the analysis mode applied in this study with some commentary on the observation of the data. The data are presented in the form of themes within two main categories; first, conceptualising entrepreneurship, which presents the meanings ascribed to the notion, and second, contextual influences on entrepreneurship practices.

Chapter six then examines the results and the commentary reported on in the previous chapter. I discuss the results in light of the literature and with the research questions, aim and

objectives in mind. This chapter discusses the two main aspects highlighted in the questions through the lenses of the empirical data gathered and the literature reviewed.

The final chapter concludes the work presented in this study. I recap the discussion of the categories and themes presented in chapters five and six; this chapter supports the main claim of this study that advocates the idea that any knowledge is perspectival and contextual.

Chapter Two: Background: The Omani Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter evolved during data collection and analysis. It serves as a background of the context and as a foundation to locate and discuss the results offered in chapters five and six. The aspects presented below are my social construction and interpretation of the key aspects that draw the context. The development of the aspects is based on their significance and relevance to the data that emerged in the narrative shared by Omani women entrepreneurs in order to make sense of them within the context (Czarniawska, 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Thus, this chapter is written retrospectively and developed iteratively with the data analysis process.

I have decided to present the context at this stage as this background information is necessary for setting the scene. The materials I have used here are collected from some governmental reports (published and unpublished), international reports from international independent bodies (such as PWC, ILO, World Bank), published and unpublished PhD theses, studies from different disciplines such as anthropology, political and economic science by various Western, Arab and Omani scholars. The first two types of materials were collected based on my local network (unpublished reports) and websites (international organisations, Omani government websites).

2.2 Chapter outline

This chapter is divided into nine sections; the first is the introduction. The second is this outline. The third illustrates Oman's geography. The fourth section offers the renaissance story of Oman's new era. The fifth presents the socio-cultural background that includes Omani society, Islam in Oman and the 'National Omani Identity' construction. The sixth section portrays the socio-political image of Oman that includes leadership style and the state system. The seventh section gives an overview of the Omani labour market, and in the eighth I lay out Omani women's condition. I conclude the key points and link them to the theoretical perspective of this study in the final section.

2.3 The Geography

The Sultanate of Oman, or Oman as widely known, is located in the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and approximately 309,500 square kilometres. Its shore extends from the Strait of Hormoz in the north to the republic of Yemen in the south which accounts for 1,700 kilometres of coastline. The coastline is open to three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It borders the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the southwest, the Hormoz bay to the north, and the Arabian Sea to the east. This location has given Oman its historical role in connecting Arab Gulf states with these countries (Al-Bulushi, 2010; omaninfo, 2017).

2.4 The Story of the Renaissance, 1970

Before 1970, according to Western historians, anthropologists and political analysts (e.g. Peterson, 2005; Valeri, 2007; Limbert, 2010), Oman was isolated politically, economically and socially. The country has suffered from poverty and poor living conditions. The economy

relied on agriculture and was pastoral with minimal or no opportunities for education and jobs (Limbert, 2010). There were only three private schools available only for male students and only two hospitals (Al-Bulushi, 2010). The country also lacked basic infrastructure such as roads, modern ports etc. As a result, many Omanis migrated for education and better living conditions, which left the country an illiterate nation (Al-Azri, 2013).

The available explanation is offered by Wikan (1982), a social anthropologist from Norway who conducted many fieldwork researches in Arabian countries including Oman (Wikipedia, 2017a). According to Wikan (1982), Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur, the previous Sultan, had deep suspicions of modern trends; which resulted in almost a complete isolation of himself and his the country. He also practised very strict rules in order to control the people in the country (Al-Azri, 2013). For example, women were not allowed to go out, sunglasses were not allowed, obtaining a book was prohibited as was smoking cigarettes on the street (Limbert, 2010).

Internally, Oman had suffered from internal social unrest during Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur's period until the 1970s, due to internal conflicts between the tribal/religious leaders, with each other and with the ruler. Conflicts are mainly reported as struggles for power, authority and ownership over territories and wealth, according to Peterson (2005), a historian from the USA and a political analyst. Peterson served as the historian of the current Sultan's Omani armed forces until 1999 (Peterson, 2017).

This scenario changed on 23 July, 1970: with the aid of British intelligence and political and military support, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the only son of Sa'id bin Taymur overthrew his father in a coup d'état (Al-Azri, 2013). Since then, the idea of Oman entering a new phase has

been promoted and depicted as a new 'dawn of Oman' and the 'modern Oman'. This phase is officially called the 'Omani renaissance' (Al-Azri, 2013).

The construction of this new Oman is built on a direct opposition to the previous era. Oman before the 1970s is promoted as living in darkness and backwardness. The new era of Oman started from the 1970s. Public education and health services are available to everyone. Roads are built and the country is connected from north to south. The new Sultan, HM, invited the Omanis living abroad to come back to the country and build the nation together. The spirit of the renaissance is propagated as building the modern Oman 'together' (Al-Azri, 2013).

Reviewing the limited literature and comparing them to what we used to hear as Omanis on how the then Sultan dealt with the internal conflicts prior to the 1970s is confusing. First, the stories of internal conflicts were and to a certain extent remain not discussed in public. The emphasis is placed on social harmony and the unified nation that HM brought. Second, reviewing the Western literature, mostly published in English in the last two decades, tells us that some conflicts were dealt with by force; more precisely with external support, such as from the British, and also, in bilateral agreement with tribal leaders in some other cases (for more details read Al-Azri's (2013) historical review). Hence, the main emphasis in the public discourse is placed on the unified nation under the 'Omani Identity' which is touched upon further below.

Historically, authority in Oman was run by religious and tribal leaders, especially in the interior areas of Oman. The Gulf countries including Oman are tribal-based societies, which has shaped the deep social structure of the monarchy of the Gulf states and society (Peterson, 2004; Valeri, 2007; Kanna, 2011). Since the early years of the new government, HM and his

government created alliances with the powerful tribal leaders and elites; which created a new phase in Oman through harmonising and closing the internal conflicts chapter and brought social stability to the 'modern Oman' (Al-Azri, 2013). Currently, Oman is considered the most stable country in the Arab Middle East (middleeasteye, 2016).

The public rhetoric of the new government placed emphasis on modernising Oman and depicts itself as a modern government. The country has witnessed tremendous transformation with modern infrastructure, modern roads, modern education and modern lifestyle for the modern, harmonised Omani nation, in addition to opening up the country to the world (Al-Azri, 2013).

One of the most significant markers of the modern transformation that HM brought to the country is women's condition; which positioned Oman as one of the first Arab countries taking the lead in changing women's situation (Albelushi, 2004; Al-Bulushi, 2010; Al-Talei, 2010). HM is considered the first Arab leader who appointed women as an ambassador and into other powerful political positions (Al-Lamki, 1999). HM's act immediately transformed Oman's position to a modern country in the international arena (Kelly, 2009). Women in Oman remain in the centre of HM's attention. They were given equal rights to education, employment and political rights (Al-Lamki, 1999; Curtiss, 1999; Khan et al., 2005).

HM's personal interest in improving women's condition is overtly expressed in his speeches and propagated strongly in the public discourse (Al-Lamki, 1999; Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Azri, 2013). Therefore, the Omani government has paid special attention to Omani women as a valuable resource in the development of the country (Al-Bulushi, 2010). Women were encouraged to participate effectively in the political, economic and social spheres (Al-Lamki,

1999; Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Azri, 2013). From the early stage of developing the new Oman, women were depicted as working side-by-side in building the nation and the country (Al-Azri, 2013). Also, there were some educated Omani women who returned to the country upon HM's call. These women were born and raised outside Oman with their families. These women were given immediate positions in the new government of HM (Al-Lamki, 1999; Chatty, 2000; Al-Azri, 2013). Thus, Omani women's presence is featured as an important pillar in the government of HM (Al-Lamki, 1999).

2.5 The Socio-cultural Background

This section offers an overview of the socio-cultural background of Omani society and culture. This section is divided into three parts; the first presents the social fabric of Omani society. The second presents Islam in Oman; and finally, the National Omani identity.

2.5.1 Omani society

Historically, scholars of Oman have divided the people based on area: urban or rural; the interior (the heart of Oman), Muscat (the capital) and the coastal area, e.g. Peterson (2004) and Limbert (2010).

Social anthropologists and historians who conducted their fieldwork in Oman (e.g. Peterson, 2004; Limbert, 2010) and contemporary political science scholars (e.g. Valeri, 2007) have described the interior area as religious, tribal and very conservative; while Muscat and the coastal are described as modern, tolerant and diverse. The interior areas were isolated before the 1970s mainly because of the difficult geography; while the coastal areas were open and mixed due to the geographical location that flourished historically because of trading (Al-Azri, 2013).

Ethnically, the interior is Arab tribes by origin; while the coastal areas are mixes of different ethnic groups which moved to Oman throughout different historical periods for trade activities, and because Oman occupied some coastal areas in Africa during certain historical periods. This ethnic mix includes Arabs, Baluchis, East Africans (Zanzibaris) and Hindu and Gujarati (Indian and Pakistani). The native languages for these groups are Arabic, Baluchi, Swahili, Urdu, Gujarati and Kutchi. All these latter groups are considered non-Arabic-speaking Omanis (Wikan, 1982; Peterson, 2004; Al-Bulushi, 2010). This diversity mix included diversity in religious affiliation and sects; while historically this diversity was reported to hold different religious affiliations, the current nation is regarded to be Muslim with variety in sectarian affiliation within Islam (Al-Azri, 2013).

2.5.2 Islam in Oman

The interior and the majority of the Arab tribes in Oman follow the Ibadi doctrine; some Arab tribes and non-Arab groups are Sunnis; while the minority of other groups of Arabs and mostly non-Arabs are Shi'a (Al-Azri, 2013).

Ibadisim is the third doctrine branch in Islam after the Sunni and Shi'a; Ibadisim counts as one per cent of Muslims and are mainly found in Oman (Hoffman, 2015). The legal system in Oman is based both on the Basic Law (The 1996 Basic Statute of the State) and on Islamic Shari'a Law. The Basic Law states that "Islam is the religion of the state and the Islamic Shari'a is the basis of legislation" (PWC, 2017, p. 7). Hence, the Shari'a Law is based on the Ibadism doctrine, which is the basis for the official religious statements that are issued from The Ministry of

Awqaf and Religious Affairs: the governmental body in that responsible for overseeing all matters related to *awqaf*[5] and religious affairs (Al-Azri, 2013).

The rationale for presenting the different sects in Oman is: first, is to highlight that even though all Omanis are Muslims, however, they are diverse in sectarian affiliation. Second, the sectarian issues in Arab countries – as evidenced nowadays – are highly sensitive and considered as a major source of conflict, and Oman sets the example of the cohabitation of three sects in Islam living peacefully together (middleeasteye, 2016). Third, although Islam in Oman encompasses three sects, however it is presented and propagated as merely Islam, despite the 'official Islam' representing only one sect of Islam, Ibadisim (Al-Azri, 2013).

2.5.3 The 'National Omani Identity'

Based on this diversity, the cultural and the social norms vary, especially between the interior and the coastal areas of Oman; very traditional and conservative tribes in the interior, in contrast to open and tolerant ones in Muscat and the coastal areas (Wikan, 1982; Limbert, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013). Hence, historically, these tribal roots framed the current societies, which in turn made the modern Oman a patriarchal and conservative society, despite the modern rhetoric (Al-Azri, 2013).

Against this background, the contemporary Omani government promoted the 'Omani National Identity', which rests on tolerance and social unity. The aim of this 'Omani National Identity' is to unify all Omanis, despite their ethnic and sectarian backgrounds. This national

[5] 'A waqf (Arabic), also known as habous or mortmain property, is an inalienable charitable endowment under Islamic law, which typically involves donating a building, plot of land or other assets for Muslim religious or charitable purposes with no intention of reclaiming the assets)' (Wikipedia, 2017b).

collective identity has been promoted since the early stage of the Omani Renaissance. Studies in this regard state that the Omani government succeeded in unifying and bringing the nation together (Valeri, 2006; Al-Azri, 2013). Hence, the model of the 'Omani National Identity' evolves around the symbolic figure of HM. HM is promoted as the father of the nation, and his leadership style is described as traditional paternalistic style (Valeri, 2015). More about HM's leadership is given in the next section.

According to the same studies, the 'Omani National Identity' is constructed based on three elements: Islamic roots, traditional heritage and cohabiting with modernity. Although Omani society comprises three Islamic sects, public discourse and the media in Oman speak about one Islam that is linked with the Omani national identity. The national Omani Islam is presented as a peaceful, harmonious and tolerant Islam that unifies different sects, which in turn feeds the social cohesion of the Omani nation (Valeri, 2006; Al-Azri, 2013).

Hence, the other two elements of the National Omani Identity are encompassed in the idea of cohabiting the traditional culture/Omani heritage with modernity. This idea was explicitly promoted and cited in HM's speeches throughout different periods. Government has paid attention to constructing the Omani national identity through different forums and conferences. However, according to Al-Azri (2013), the strong emphasis from the government on the importance of heritage and traditional culture has increased the conservative level of the Omani society over time. Thus, Oman appears to be modern from the outside, with material objects mainly such as physical infrastructure and appearance; but is shaped by deeply rooted traditional conservative culture on the inside.

Al-Azri (2013) argues that modernity in Oman represents the notion of 'neo-patriarchy' that is described by Hisham Sharabi (1992). Sharabi argues that modernisation in the Arab state is only the surface of change, while it is "remodelling and reorganising patriarchal structures and relations to reinforce them by giving them 'modern' forms and appearance'" (cited in Al-Azri, 2013, p. 118).

Therefore, the traditional culture is enhanced by governmental practices which sustain the traditional mentality despite the modern surface. Thus, in today's Omani society, Omani culture is described as a conservative, traditional and patriarchal society (Al-Azri, 2013, p. 50).

2.6 Socio-political Background

This section offers two key features of the political system: first, the paternalistic leadership style, and second, the rentier state system. These two features combined have influenced Omani society, workforce behaviour, labour market trends and entrepreneurship. Finally, I conclude by drawing the main aspects of the two features.

2.6.1 The Paternalistic Leadership

Since the 1970s, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has been framed as the 'father of the nation'; his leadership style is known in the Western leadership literature as traditional paternalistic (Neal et al., 2007; Valeri, 2015; Al-Moosa, forthcoming). This leadership style is common among different Arab tribal-based societies. This leadership style is shaped by the deeply rooted tribal social system and familial structure (Finlay et al., 2003; Peterson, 2005; Neal et al., 2007). This form of Arab-specific leadership style is named *Sheikoratic*, which is defined as equivalent to the paternalistic model (Finlay et al., 2003; Neal et al., 2007).

The hierarchy of the tribes depends on the leader, known as a *sheikh*[6]. The relationship between the leader and the members of the tribe is best viewed as paternalistic; especially that tribes are originally based on kinship. The role of the tribal leader / sheikh is to look after the needs of the tribe in exchange for loyalty and obedience (Peterson, 2005). The decision making process is based on embedded interaction and consultation, where every member of the tribe has access to the sheikh and expects their issues to be taken seriously (Finlay et al., 2003). These practices remain alive in most areas of Oman. There is no mention of women in any of this research; but my experience as a woman is that primarily, these spaces are men-only spaces, but we could meet the tribal leader based on request and on necessity; however, more privately and not in the public meetings.

The tribal male leader lies at the centre of this social structure (Finlay et al., 2003; Peterson, 2005; Neal et al., 2007). This structure is reflected in shaping the government in Oman and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, as described by Peterson (2005):

> The ruler, like the shaykh of the tribe, like the father of a family, is the father of his country. He demands respect, obedience, and total loyalty. In exchange, he assumes responsibility for the protection and welfare of his constituents. (p. 8)

The power structure in the tribes is determined by a member's place in the nexus of family, friends and allies. Thus, members are in a constant state of seeking the shiekh's attention for favours and other benefits through feting and flattery. This form of relationship puts emphasis on maintaining social ties and relationships and enshrines hierarchy. Thus, tribalism is a dynamic social system that is very politicised (Peterson, 2005; Neal et al., 2007). The ruling

[6] Spelled sheikh, shaykh or sheik

families have strong ties with the tribal leaders and rely on for in managing/controlling internal issues (Chatty, 1983; Kanna, 2011).

Although western leadership literature has named it *Sheikoratic*, and describes it as equivalent to the paternalistic model, I consider this analogy problematic and misleading, given that the 'Western' family structure is not similar to the 'Arab' one. In Gulf societies, the family size is large and includes extended family, which makes the responsibility shared among their members (El-Haddad, 2003). The father is at the top of the hierarchy with full authority over family members, which makes the Arab family a patriarchal one, which in turn is echoed in the tribe and the state (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Hence, parental obedience is highly valued in Gulf societies, and remains a key factor in major decisions such as education and career choices (Al-Bulushi, 2010).

In the case of Oman, where traditional culture remains strong, and the underlining structure of the society is shaped by tribal and patriarchal family structure, the current Omani society – the state and the nation – are shaped by a traditional paternalistic style (Peterson, 2005). Given the centrality of family in the Arab society, and the father's position at the top of the hierarchy (El-Haddad, 2003), this results in full loyalty to the leadership on one hand, and dependency on the state on the other hand (Peterson, 2005; Ennis, 2013). However, Valeri (2015) argues that the new Omani generation holds and expresses more critical views towards the government, but not towards the persona of HM.

Also, Valeri (2015) highlights that the fatherhood figure of HM has shaped the Omani nation. He argues that the 'Omani identity' evolves around HM. For example, Oman celebrates two

Omani national days: the first is on 23 July, which is the date HM came to power; the second is 18 November, which is HM's birthday.

2.6.2 The Rentier State

The 'rentier state' is a concept that comes from economics; the underlying assumption is the rent model, where rent is given to landlords for no productive effort. The rentier economy/state depends on external profit gained from renting non-reproducible resources; which is oil in the case of the Gulf states (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987; Ennis, 2013). Although this analogy might not describe the exact condition of the rent model, the idea one can draw from this concept is that wealth is accumulated without effort.

Thus, the rentier state relies on neither its domestic production nor its taxes. The distribution of wealth is exclusively managed by the state. The state distributes wealth to its citizens as free services; such as employment, housing, industrial development and other products and services (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; Ennis, 2013).

Under this system, a social contract is created between the rulers and the ruled where the former provide welfare in exchange for the latter's loyalty (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987). Citizens are not expected to express views or have a say in the state's economic or political affairs (Ennis, 2013). The underlying assumption is that there is no representation without taxation, which is described as political submission of the citizens (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987; Ennis, 2013). Hence, in order to sustain this relationship, the state creates a new social contract every now and then (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). For example, Ennis (2013) suggests that entrepreneurship is a new form of social contract.

This model created a behaviour that has been called by economic scholars as 'rentier mentality' (Niblock and Malik, 2007); where the relationship is not clear between effort and reward. Wealth in this regard is perceived as a result of happenstance rather than productivity; it is the mind-set of unearned income and rent-seeking behaviour. Also, this mentality created dependency behaviour, from the state itself on the rented income, and the citizens on the state. Thus, it is a behaviour that is developed by the state and extended to society creating rent-seeking behaviour income (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987; Luciani, 1990; Niblock and Malik, 2007; Ennis, 2013).

The impact of this mentality has shaped the national workforce in different aspects; first, it created apathetic work values associated with reward without effort, income without productivity. Second, dependency behaviour can be seen in the heavy reliance of state and locals on expatriates (further details provided in the labour market section) (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987; Luciani, 1990; Ennis, 2013), which in turn has impacted the social behaviour of work trends; first, it created the tendency towards easy work with reward, and second, depending on someone else to do the hard work (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010).

In this scenario, the notion of employment is problematic. Employment in the Gulf states is viewed as a form of social contract (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Employment has been used by the state to reduce tension between the governments and with their nations (Ennis and Al- Jamali, 2014). The best example is the case of Oman: Oman faced protests during the Arab Spring in 2011. The main reason for Omanis' protest is reported to be the increasing number of unemployed youth; where, according to Ennis and Al-Jamali (2014), the government has responded immediately by creating 50,000 jobs in the public sector; while Valeri (2015) frames this job creation being made on HM orders. As an Omani myself, this job

creation is regarded as an order by HM. In addition, and while writing this thesis, the issue of unemployment surfaced again in the public domain, but this time it was virtually through a hashtag on Twitter; which – again – HM responded to, on 4 October, 2017, by creating 25,000 jobs that should be ready by December 2017, without specifying the sectors (Atheer, 2017).

As will be seen below, the rentier mentality and behaviour have shaped the Omani labour market, which is presented in the following section.

2.7 Omani Labour Market

This is an overview of the main features of the Omani labour market. Building on the grounds of paternalistic leadership style and rentier mentality, this section draws a portrait of the Omani labour market.

This section covers history, demographics and employment trends. The second subsection gives an idea on Omanisation; the third covers business, the SME sector and entrepreneurship.

2.7.1 Overview

With oil exports since the 1970s, ambitious plans for developing the country have driven the government to import expatriates to build the infrastructure of the country. The exporting of oil offered financial boosts to the development plans. Hence, oil remains the main source of revenue in Oman; although production is considered moderate (Limbert, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013), Oman relies heavily on oil (Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014).

In order to diversify the economy, the government has introduced various plans since 1995; for example, Oman Vision (2020) (see Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014, for more details). Oman is

considered as the leading country among the Gulf states in planning for economic diversification. However, according to Ennis and Al-Jamali (2014), Oman did not achieve its economic goals, leaving the country relying merely on oil.

Also, the government focused on educating and employing the nation during the early 1970s and 1980s; thus, the public sector became the main employer for locals, while importing expatriates for the private sector. This resulted in imbalances in the labour market, with locals saturating the public sector, and expatriates in the private sector. Most of the expatriates occupy low-rank jobs that require no or low skills and are mostly from Asia (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2011; Forstenlechner et al., 2012).

Omani youth remain attracted to work in the public sector (NCSI, 2015). Public sector jobs are characterised as secure, low working hours, financial rewards, good pension schemes, social prestige and most importantly, are jobs for life (Al-Ghassani, 2010; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Also, one can start a business on the side (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). As a result, locals prefer to remain unemployed until receiving a government job (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010).

Moreover, Omanis and expatriates are not treated under the same umbrella of regulations. The differences in employment rights are distinctive, with priority given to locals (Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014).

However, the demand for foreign labour is on the rise due to international investments in parallel with the increasing number of young unemployed Omanis. Economists and international reports assert that Oman has some serious issues in employment plans and

strategies. One of the main employment strategies for locals is Omanisation (Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014).

2.7.1.1 Demographics

Generally, there are problems with official figures in Gulf countries in terms of scarcity and access. Also, figures offered by international organisations contradict local reports, which create accuracy problems (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014).

According to the 'Women and Men in the Sultanate of Oman' report published by the National Centre of Statistics and Information in 2014 (NCSI, 2014), the population of Oman stood at 3,855,206 by mid 2013, of which Omanis were 2,172,388 and half of these were women. The rest of the population was expatriate, 46 per cent (PWC, 2017).

The Omani workforce in both private and public sectors stood at 338,870 by 2012; around 30.55 per cent were women; almost 88 per cent of working women were under the age of 40. Around 86 per cent of the local workforce was employed in the public sector; 58 per cent were women. Women were concentrated in the public sector in mainly education and healthcare sectors. Also, Omani women withdraw from the labour market at an early stage due to traditional gender stereotypes and family obligations, as framed by the report (NCSI, 2014).

Also, Oman is a growing population, with 78.4 per cent under the age of 35, and an estimated unemployment rate of 15 per cent in the age group of 15–24 (Buckley and Rynhart, 2011). The jobseeker numbers estimate stood at 39 per cent women and 19 per cent men in 2010. Despite that, Omani women are better qualified (NCSI, 2014).

Against the above, the key features of the Omani labour market are: first, the private sector relies heavily on expatriates. Second, the public sector is the main employer for Omanis, and the most desired. Third, women are concentrated and represent the higher percentage of public sector employees despite leaving jobs at an early stage. Fourth, Omani women represent the higher percentage of job seekers, despite qualifications.

2.7.2 Omanisation

Omanisation, according to Forstenlechner et al. (2012), falls under the quota policy; which is a technique used in diversity management. Primarily, the aim of the quota policy is changing the demographics and the diversity of the workforce, which includes one or more than one social category such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability or others (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). However, in the Gulf states, governments enforce quota systems to create jobs for locals in the private sector. Organisations operating in the Gulf must fulfil the national quota percentage in certain occupations and sectors (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). This analogy might be misleading, however, in application, as the Gulf countries contradict the original aim of the quota system; but this is how scholars in labour market policy have described the localisation policies in Gulf countries.

Omanisation policy started in 1995 and targeted mainly un-skilled and low paid jobs (e.g. drivers, cashiers, waiters). The government enforced certain regulations in order to attract locals. For example, basic salary for Omanis, working hours, holidays and pension schemes and so on (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Although Omanisation is considered successful in comparison to Gulf countries, Omanisation is facing challenges; and local unemployment is on the rise which creates tensions with the authority (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2011; Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Ennis and Al-Jamali, 2014; Ennis, 2015). As

mentioned earlier, the issue of unemployment is reported to be the main driver for Omani protests in 2011 (Valeri, 2015).

2.7.3 Business in Oman

This section offers an overview of the business environment in Oman; it includes doing business, self-employment programmes, the SME sector and entrepreneurship.

2.7.3.1 Doing Business

Individuals or companies wanting to set up business in Oman need an Omani partner with minimum 30 per cent shareholding depending on the business type and sector (PWC, 2017).

Gulf countries practice the *Kafala* system, offered to nationals only. It refers to sponsoring an expatriate on a work visa. This system allows nationals to 'import' and 'deport' expatriates. Thus, most businesses are owned by locals, but managed by expatriates. This scenario is known locally as 'hidden trade' (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; Al-Shanfari et al., 2013; Al-Mataani, 2017).

Research about hidden trade is scarce, and it is unique to the Gulf countries (Al-Mataani, 2017). The 'hidden trade' refers to businesses owned by Omanis and run by expatriates in exchange for monthly fees. Officially, hidden trade is prohibited and informal, but remains heavily in practice (Al-Mataani, 2017). This behaviour could fall under the rent-seeking mentality; where locals receive a fixed income by sponsoring an expatriate running the business, despite the business's revenues.

2.7.3.2 Self- employment

In 2001, under the name of HM, the government initiated a self- employment programme – SANAD. The aim of the programme is to accelerate Omanisation by creating jobs for Omanis in small businesses (Khan et al., 2005). The Ministry of Manpower was in charge of this programme before it moved to PASMED in 2013.

Other programmes were offered such as the 'Fund for Development of Youth' that was developed in 1999. The fund was granted by HM and targeted the youth. The aim was to encourage youth to start small and medium enterprises. This programme was set on bigger projects than SANAD (Khan et al., 2005).

Other private entities established SME support programmes such as 'Intilaaqa' by the Shell Oil Company. The aim of this programme was to provide young unemployed or self-employed Omanis with training and consultancy (Khan et al., 2005). This programme remains in place, and runs joint programmes with the government.

2.7.3.3 SME Sector

The SME sector in Oman is in its infant phase; some reports state that 40 per cent of the workforce are working in SMEs, but differentiation cannot be made between Omanis from expatriates due to the hidden trade (Al Barwani et al., 2014). The Directorate General of the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises was established in 2007 by Royal Decree No 19/2007 at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. This department continued in operation until 2013 when the Public Authority of SME Development (PASMED) was established (Al Barwani et al., 2014).

By definition, small and medium enterprises are defined by number of employees and annual turnover, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for SME definition

	Company size	Number of employees	Annual Turn Over (O.R.)
1	Micro	1–4	<25,000
2	Small	5–9	25,000 – <250,000
3	Medium	10–99	250,000 – <1,500,000

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry – SME Development Symposium Main Report – 2013 (Al-Shanfari et al.*, 2013)*

2.7.3.4 Entrepreneurship

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, PASMED was established by Royal Decree No. 36/ 2013 by HM in January 2013 as a result of the SME Development Symposium (Times of Oman, 2013). The main aim of creating employment opportunities was to meet the challenges of a young and fast growing nation (Al-Shanfari et al., 2013).

The definitions of SMEs under PASMED are the old ones established by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Table 1).

After establishing PASMED, existing Omani business owners had the option to register with PASMED as an entrepreneur after registering the business with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Omanis who register with PASMED must be full-time entrepreneurs. By registering as an entrepreneur, Omanis are entitled to government support, which includes funding, mentoring services, training and consultancy, among others (riyada.om, 2017).

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the definition of entrepreneurship is only found in the unpublished SME Development Symposium Main Report (2013) (Al-Shanfari et al., 2013) and was circulated among the committees during the symposium.

Also, entrepreneurship strategy and policy and legal framework are yet to be issued (Al-Mataani, 2017), and to the date of writing this thesis; the current legal framework is under the Ministry of Commerce, which does not differentiate business from entrepreneurship. Also, the Oman News Agency (ONA) published on 25th Feb that the total number of registrations in PASMED until January 2018 is 32,441 enterprises (ONA, 2018), with no details about sex.

2.8 Omani Women

The government rhetoric treated women and men equally; government addresses women and men as one group (Omanuna, 2017). Also, discrimination based on gender is prohibited in Article 17 of the Basic Law of the Omani State (Al-Talei, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013).

The only department that is concerned for women's issues is the General Directorate of Women and Children Affairs that was established in 1985 at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (at that time, now divided between two ministries, Ministry of Social Affairs/ development, and Ministry of Manpower since 2001). This department deals with issues of eradication of illiteracy, developing the handicraft sector, and enhancing women's role as a citizen, among other programmes (Al-Lamki, 1999; Khan et al., 2005).

In 2009, HM announced 17 October to be the annual 'Omani Women's Day' (omaninfo.2017). Ever since, Oman – represented in different public and private entities – celebrates women's

achievements to place emphasis on women's role under HM patronage. The following quote is extracted from HM's announcement of Oman Women's Day

> We are continuing on this path, God willing as we are, that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women because no doubt it resembles the bird in relying on both its wings to fly high on the horizons of the sky. How can this bird manage if one of its wings is broken? Will it be able to fly? (Oman National Day, 2018)

Hence, Omani and non-Omani scholars argue that despite the overt rhetoric of equality, the reality however is different. First, Oman's legal system, which is based on the Shari'a law, is biased: for example, exclusive divorce rights, child custody, and unequal inheritance rights (Al-Talei, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013). Second, some regulations and policies are discriminatory. For example, a married woman needs her husband's permission to obtain a passport (Al-Talei, 2010). Third, government practices are along religious and traditional lines (Al-Talei, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013). For example, there are no legal requirements for guardianship consent, but they remain in practice. Officials do not get involved if the guardian does not allow 'his' women to work; it is considered a domestic issue (Al-Talei, 2010). In other words, if a woman is working, studying or traveling, it is assumed that she has her guardian's consent. Other day-to-day activities are practised with the same logic.

The notion of guardianship is rooted in Islamic teaching, where a woman needs her guardian's permission in different aspects (Aldosari, 2016). As a Muslim woman myself, the level of authority of the guardian varies among different Islamic sects, and is practised differently in each Muslim country. In reviewing the literature on women entrepreneurs in the Gulf countries, the guardianship practice is acknowledged and addressed as religious sometimes and as cultural at others (Madichie and Gallant, 2012) and as mandatory by law in some

countries (Welsh et al., 2014). In addition, society resists and constrains women's actual participation (Al-Riyami et al., 2002). Omani society places strong emphasis on the traditional gender roles; thus Omani working women face familial and social pressures (Al-Bulushi, 2010) and discriminatory gender cultural practices (Al-Lamki, 1999; Al-Azri, 2013).

Also, Oman is originally a sex-segregated society. Most families – especially in the interior – for example, practise strict social codes for mixing, some families do not allow mixing even with cousins; while Omani people in Muscat, mostly from ethnic groups/tribes practise less strict codes on sex-segregation (Al-Azri, 2013). Although the level of mixing varies across Oman, which depends highly on place, tribe and ethnic background, sex-segregation remains the norm (Al-Azri, 2013) and preferred (Al-Bulushi, 2010).

With this in mind, and after the 1970s when women were encouraged to work by the government and by HM's appointment (Chatty, 2000), almost all workplaces by definition are mixed, except the education system (Al-Bulushi, 2010). Higher education is considered mixed. Al-Azri (2013) argues that strict codified rules are implicitly and symbolically applied. Interestingly, the mixed environment refers to mixed buildings rather than mixed offices. The workplace, government offices and administration system, is a sex-distinctive system; meaning, there are separate spaces for women, however, within the same building (Al-Riyami et al., 2002). (I have mentioned the mixed condition at SQU in my background section in the introduction chapter.)

In order to elaborate further on gender issues within culture and religious practices, I decided to present a brief of two studies' findings in the Omani context that were conducted by Omani researchers. One study is from an anthropologist perspective and the second is from an

educational discipline that applied mixed-method approach. The rationale behind this decision is to present key points related to women in Omani culture, on the basis of clarifying women's position in Omani society, and working women in Oman.

2.8.1 Religion, Culture and Practices

The first study presents women's position between religion, government rhetoric and cultural practices; while the second study presents the experience of Omani female teachers.

The first is an anthropological study which was conducted by an Omani scholar Al-Azri (2013), where he studied "gender and social inequality in Oman" through examining certain cultural practices that are defined by Shari'a law, divorce and Kufu' – which is marriage compatibility. Al-Azri argues that the religious rhetoric in public discourse contradicts the modernity rhetoric led by the government. He states that the governmental practices are within the religious and cultural lines which perpetuate traditional gender biases. He examined women's position from different datasets, which included official booklets, a TV programme episode, and some interviews and focus groups with Western-educated Omani career women and other educated Omani men and women.

The booklet was based on public lessons of the official religious figure 'the Mufti' in Oman titled: 'Laws of Islam for Women: An Answer to Nature's Calling' published in the late 1980s. The summary of his analysis highlighted that the booklet positioned gender on biological difference; women are by nature emotional while men are rational. These differences are explained and justified by religion, using Quranic verses. Al-Azri goes further and analyses some of the Muftis' speeches. The Mufti have used Western scientific studies' facts to support that women and men are biologically different (the study of Alexis Carrel (1873–1944)); which

in Al-Azri's view is that this form of speech, apart from its function in shaping society, represents the cohabitation of 'modernity' and the 'traditional' definition of 'Omani Identity' that the Omani government is promoting. Meaning, the 'scientific' Western studies are used to support the 'traditional' gender roles stated in Islam.

The second dataset is a TV programme episode. It was a talk show entitled 'Youth Debate' broadcast mid 2011. The episode he analysed discussed gender relations. The audience included Omani academics and a mix of female and male students from SQU. The views of these students were that women are weaker, less bright due to women's limited nature. So, the nature of women prevents them from being equal.

The last dataset included interviews and focus groups which included educated individuals from both sexes. The majority of participants confirmed the idea that women and men are biologically different; women are emotional and men are rational. Also, individuals believed that Islam equalised people in broader terms; however these views became contradictory when asked about the gender equality practices in religion and culture such as divorce. Al-Azri concluded that the majority rejects the idea of equalising the sexes in practice; with strong tendencies to the traditional roles of gender in Omani society.

However, some of the Western-educated Omani women expressed their dilemma, which is caused by the contradictions between the official, modern rhetoric led by the government, the religious rhetoric, and the contradiction in the law, in addition to the conservative social and cultural practices. These women also expressed their scepticism regarding the seriousness of the government in changing women's position and believed that the government have a political agenda in women's condition.

The second study is based on mixed-method approach aimed to investigate career choices, motivation and challenges among Omani female teachers in Oman (Al-Bulushi, 2010). It was published in 2010 by the Ministry of Social Development for the Omani Women Day's celebration. This study revealed some insights into working Omani women's realities.

The findings demonstrate that teaching is perceived to be an appropriate, suitable and comfortable job for women. Appropriateness refers to the sex-segregation teaching system. This reason seems to be the main drive for families to push or encourage their daughters into the teaching profession. Suitability refers to compatibility with women's nature, the maternal condition; while comfortable refers to teaching being perceived as an easy job in terms of holidays and working hours, which in turn allows women to perform their domestic duties well.

Moreover, other issues can be drawn from this study such as: first, a woman's job is perceived as a secondary job and an extra income, while a man's job is the priority due to traditional gender roles. Second, career choices are made for women, by their parents, specifically, the father. Third, the husband's consent for married women is vital; married women do teaching because that it is the only job the husband allows.

Also, the discussion of this study emphasised that while the government is explicitly encouraging women's participation, the traditional culture and social norms resist. Working women face familial and social pressures; therefore, neither education nor career choice were personal for women teachers in this study.

Against this background, one gathers that the traditional cultural and social norms remain strong in Omani society. The majority of Omani society, including women, place emphasis on

the traditional gender roles. Despite the government's modernisation rhetoric, cultural norms shape women's condition.

2.9 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have laid out key aspects of the Omani context as a background and as a foundation for the empirical data. Here, I draw the main points, followed by situating the theoretical underpinning of this study.

First, the idea HM as the father of the nation has formed a parenting relationship with the nation (Neal et al., 2007; Valeri, 2015).

Second, HM is the one who has changed Omani women's condition, at least symbolically, which in turn has shaped women's position in Oman. However, HM's own interest in imposing women on the society has most likely created a top-down model of change. Meaning, women can achieve higher and powerful positions with the support of and by HM's appointment (Al-Lamki, 1999).

Third, dependency mentality and behaviour is rooted in the father's relationship with daughters within the Arab family structure. This behaviour is enhanced by the rentier state. This has created a society that relies on the state on one hand, and on the expatriate on the other (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010).

Fourth, the dependency behaviour has shaped the business and the personal life of locals, for example, hidden trade in business (Al-Mattani, 2017) and domestic services in personal life (El-Haddad, 2003).

Fifth, the state's rhetoric on the 'National Omani Identity' is propagated as a cohabitation of traditional heritage with modernity. The government rhetoric reinforced the traditional culture due to the emphasis given in the public discourse which increased the conservative level of society. Hence, Omani society seems to accept Western ideas if framed or reinforced through religious beliefs (Al-Azri, 2013).

Sixth, women are perceived as naturally different; thus women must work in appropriate, suitable and comfortable jobs that suit their nature (Al-Bulushi, 2010). The studies stated that Omani society remains attached to the traditional gender stereotype; and emphasises the cultural practices that shape gender relations (Al-Azri, 2013).

With the context in mind, and adopting the theoretical perspective of social constructionism of meanings and practices within a context, this thesis brings a new perspective on entrepreneurship and gender and other possible social forms in the Omani context. By including the social doing theoretical perspective (West and Zimmerman, 1987), this thesis brings the 'appropriateness of gender' into the act of entrepreneurship and vice versa (Bruni et al., 2004) from the perspective of individuals living it, and other possible doings that might have been missed in the literature. As highlighted in the introduction chapter, I explore the meanings and the contextual influences that shape the meanings and the doings of Omani women entrepreneurs.

Having said that, I turn to the Western entrepreneurship literature to explore how the notion is positioned, and what is offered about Arab Muslim women.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

After presenting the contextual background, I turn to develop an understanding of the notion of women's entrepreneurship in the literature. The overall aim of this chapter is to explore and examine how the notion is conceptualised and treated theoretically in the available literature; and accordingly, how I decided to explore and tackle the concept in this thesis.

As the review demonstrates, the traditional theory of entrepreneurship and practice is depicted as universal and abstract, while it systematically marginalises other voices and perspectives (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Also, women are treated as a homogeneous group, which in turn privileges the experience of Western women over women of colour, race and ethnic groups (Mirchandani, 1999; Harvey, 2005). Thus, Arab women's entrepreneurs have been studied with reference to Western women's experience, which resulted in ethnocentric and Eurocentric studies (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009). Thus, this chapter highlights the key assumptions in women's entrepreneurship literature; accordingly, I highlight the underlying assumptions that have framed and guided research approaches to non-Western women entrepreneurs. Based on the theoretical underpinning of this study, this chapter draws key issues from the current studies on Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship; and I propose how I intend to overcome these issues.

3.2 Chapter outline

I have divided this chapter into two parts; the first part tackles the origins and development of the notion. Then I present the current contemporary critiques, which takes me to the critical studies in entrepreneurship, where I locate my thesis. Towards the end of this part, I expand on the theoretical perspective that is presented in chapter one, and explain in further detail the theoretical approach I intend to apply.

In the second part, I turn to review the limited literature on Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship. Focusing on the Arab context, I offer commentary on how this group are studied and presented in the current literature. Then, and building on the contemporary critiques of women's entrepreneurship perspectives that are highlighted in the first part, I draw the key issues of the problems of the current studies. In the light of these problems, I delve into the critical entrepreneurship studies and suggest how my theoretical approach might fulfil the issues presented in this section. Finally, I summarise the chapter in the last section.

3.3 Part One: Women's entrepreneurship

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that most of – if not all – the literature available about women's entrepreneurship is developed and published in English and in the Western academic arena; therefore, these studies are the main sources for the review in my thesis.

In order to explore and examine the notion of women's entrepreneurship, I found myself tracing the roots of the notion of entrepreneurship. Women's entrepreneurship studies entered the field at a later stage and expanded on the established theory of entrepreneurship.

Therefore, I conduct a historical overview of how the notion started, developed and turned into the current debates.

3.3.1 Historical Overview

Tracking women's entrepreneurship took me back to the origins of entrepreneurship itself in the entrepreneurship literature. The literature on women's entrepreneurship entered the field of entrepreneurship in the 1970s and 1980s, and became a recognised field by the 1990s (Minniti and Naudé, 2010); while the concept of entrepreneurship in the literature is dated back to the twelfth century in French history, and is dated back to the seventeenth century in the academic research on entrepreneurship (Landström and Lohrke, 2010).

The origins of the term *entrepreneurship* come from the French verb *entreprendre* which means *to undertake*; the term first appeared in a French dictionary in 1437 and was associated with a person who is active and achieves something (Landstrom, 1999). In the early sixteenth century, the term *entrepreneur* was used to refer to men who led military expeditions in France. During the seventeenth century, the term was used to refer to individuals who took risks (Westhead and Wright, 2013); while during the eighteenth century, the term was used to refer to individuals who performed large tasks mostly in construction projects with the state or wealthy individuals for a fixed price (Landstrom, 1999). Hence, the French government applied the term to contractors on the harbours and the roads (Westhead and Wright, 2013).

Academically, the concept is associated with Richard Cantillon's work. Cantillon is considered to be the one who introduced the concept of entrepreneur to economics thinkers and the discipline (Landström and Lohrke, 2010). He developed the term from its French origin, which

is the ability to take charge (Burns, 2016), and added aspects such as profit, risk-taking and uncertainty (Landström and Lohrke, 2010).

Until the eighteenth century, the concept of *entrepreneur* had no equivalent in the English language (Westhead and Wright, 2013). The first definition appeared in 1755 in *A Dictionary of the English Language* which defined entrepreneur as an "adventurer, he that seeks occasion of hazard, he that puts himself in the hand of chance" (cited in Westhead and Wright, 2013, p. 5). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an entrepreneur as "a person who attempts to profit by risk and initiative" (cited in Burns, 2016, p. 9); while entrepreneur is defined by the Oxford University Press (1998) as "a person who owns and runs a business – not necessarily a new, small, growing or successful business" (cited in Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic, 2013, p. 5). Cambridge University Press (2008) defines an entrepreneur as "someone who starts their own business, especially when this involves risks" (cited in Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic, 2013, p. 5).

As the review demonstrates, the concept of entrepreneur expanded over time and included many different aspects until the capitalist version of profit and risk taking took over and replaced the French one (Westhead and Wright, 2013).

Primarily, the association of entrepreneurship with economic aspects was developed and introduced to economics by Calinton (1755) (Landström and Lohrke, 2010). Thus, the early and the main influential thinkers of entrepreneurship theory and research come from economics, such as Knight (1921) and Schumpeter (1934). Knight (1921) expanded on risk and uncertainties which he considered as the main function of entrepreneurs. Kirzner (1973) added the element of opportunities and considered it as the core of entrepreneurship.

Schumpeter (1934), who is considered the most influential and most cited author in entrepreneurship research (Ahl, 2006), introduced the element of innovation into entrepreneurship, that impacts and changes the economy.

At the early stage of developing entrepreneurship theory, the central focus evolved around the entrepreneur. The proliferation of psychological theories in academia has shaped the beginnings of entrepreneurship studies. Therefore, the early entrepreneurship studies focused on describing, identifying and differentiating entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs (Gartner, 1985). An entrepreneur was considered as an extraordinary individual with a certain set of qualities that can be identified and replicated (e.g. Shapero, 1975). Within the psychological disciplines, the psychologist McClelland's (1961) work has dominated past research and influenced the interest of research in identifying, describing and prescribing the personality traits of an entrepreneur (Low and MacMillan, 1988; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

McClelland (1961) suggested that the personality traits an entrepreneur has are the main drive for his entrepreneurial behaviour. McClelland (1961) introduced "need theory" where he proposed that entrepreneurs are driven by a strong psychological need for achievement. Under the same logic, different scholars added new traits that are considered essential in an entrepreneur's personality/characteristics, for example: locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and personal initiative (Frese, 1995), among others. Gartner (1985) summarised the main characteristics of an entrepreneur that have been used widely in research: a) need for achievement; b) locus of control; c) risk taking.

Driven by the psychological approaches logic in entrepreneurship studies, other models were proposed, for example, the psychodynamic (e.g. De Vries, 1977), and cognitive perspectives (e.g. Baron, 1998). This in turn has resulted in proposing different entrepreneurial profiles, typologies and descriptions of entrepreneurs (Gartner, 1985).

Following the research fashion, these studies were based on variable analytical/variance models, controlled factors and causality relationships where entrepreneurship was perceived as an economic function that revolves around profit and economic growth, and identified characteristics that can predict entrepreneurial behaviour (Ahl, 2006; Galloway et al., 2015).

Within these psychological and cognitive approaches, the context of an entrepreneur had a small and limited share in the early studies of entrepreneurship. The context was acknowledged in terms of the background of an entrepreneur. The background referred to the demographic and the socio-economic factors such as education, experience and family history in business. Although there was a slight shift in the scope and focus from within the individual to the situation that leads to entrepreneurial behaviour, the main aim of studying this background was to identify the correlation of the entrepreneur's traits and behaviours based on variance logic and models (Low and MacMillan, 1988).

Thus, the behavioural approaches started to feature in entrepreneurship research after the psychological approaches, which paid a little more attention and broadened the context of an entrepreneur. The behavioural approaches focused on the action undertaken by an entrepreneur in reaction to the environment they lived in (Gartner, 1985). The environment in these models was categorised into an external factors format, which again can be identified, controlled and predicted (Ahl, 2006). For example, the idea of 'push' and 'pull'

factors was suggested by Shapero and Sokol (1982). This idea implies that the environment plays a vital role in making entrepreneurs either by attracted to entrepreneurship or forced into it. Another widely used example was Gartner's (1985) framework, which supports the idea that the external factors encourage an entrepreneurial behaviour. For example, he refers to government policies as external factors which shape the available resources.

The notion of culture started to feature in entrepreneurship studies between the 1980s and 1990s (Hayton et al., 2002). Cultures were dichotomised into either/or format, defined in economic functionality, and treated as a variable (Hayton et al., 2002). The underlying premise is that certain cultures produce entrepreneurial behaviours and vice versa (Low and MacMillan, 1988). Thus, cultures are treated as either entrepreneurial or non-entrepreneurial (Javillonar and Peters, 1973).

Hence, the majority of entrepreneurship studies have used the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) (Hayton et al., 2002). The studies which have used Hofstede's model hypothesised that entrepreneurship is facilitated by cultures. Thus results show that cultures which ranked high in individualism, low in uncertainty avoidance, low in power distance, and high in masculinity are considered entrepreneurial; while cultures which do not fit these categories, are considered as less or non-entrepreneurial (Hayton et al., 2002).

Another less common perspective that also acknowledged the environment is the ecological perspective, which developed over time (e.g. Greenfield and Strickon, 1981). This approach is based on the analogy of biological thinking, which suggests that the only enterprises that are able to survive are the ones that are capable of adapting to their environment. This approach criticised the static paradigm of entrepreneurship research, which denied the dynamics of the

social process in the real world. This approach proposes a new paradigm that incorporated elements of chance. The model developed included the dynamics of change and competition, and gives room to chance and luck. However, this model is considered to be a strategy-based approach which focuses on the adaptation of enterprises to the surrounding environment (Greenfield and Strickon, 1981). Although this approach aligns with Gartner's (1985) model in terms of contextualising the environment in external factors, it seems that this approach is less popular in comparison to Gartner's model and Hofstede's cultural dimension in entrepreneurship research; however, it is worth highlighting how context was conceptualised and researched in the early studies.

Also, sociological perspectives contributed in the early entrepreneurship literature in order to explain the entrepreneur's behaviour. The sociological contribution started early in the 1930s, but the psychological approaches seem to dominate the field of entrepreneurship. Despite their importance, little is found about entrepreneurship within sociology in the early years. The most noticeable work is Weber (1930). The work of Weber (1930) is considered the first which gave the social context a significant value. He suggested and argued that there is a strong relationship between the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant work ethic, which impacted entrepreneurial behaviour. Hence, in his attempt to explore the link between religion and entrepreneurial behaviour, he included Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. In this regard, Weber claimed that the Calvinists' work ethic derived from the Christian Protestants' which encourages entrepreneurial behaviour, and described the other religions as non-entrepreneurial based on their work ethic. Weber's work has received a lot of criticism, which can summarised thus: first, Weber treated religion as a discrete factor that has a direct and only impact on behaviour, which stripped religion from its context; second, he denied any

other contextual factors that might have impact on entrepreneurial behaviour such as culture and race; third, Weber's work is considered to represent a certain society and culture (Mohd Rhouse, 2013). Although Weber's work has received criticism, his work has shed light on the impact of ideological background/religion on entrepreneurial behaviour, and Weber's work is considered the first to link entrepreneurship to the larger social context (Low and MacMillan, 1988).

3.3.1.1 Main tenets in entrepreneurship research

By the 1970s, the grounds of the classic entrepreneurship theory were established (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Drawing on the historical overview, key tenets in entrepreneurship theory and practice can be summarised as follows.

First, the research fashion at the early stage of entrepreneurship studies was built on the objectivist epistemology and positivist paradigm, which framed how research was shaped and undertaken (Ogbor, 2000). The objectivist epistemology and positivist paradigm drew the ideology for the mainstream entrepreneurship theory and practice (Calas et al., 2009).

Second, the origin of the concept and its later development is centred on the individual. The entrepreneur is depicted and propagated as an extraordinary figure who is achievement-orientated, has high internal locus of control and takes risks with high ability to deal with uncertainty (Shapero, 1975; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

Third, the early and the main thinkers in entrepreneurship come from economics. Therefore, they have defined entrepreneurship by large as an economic function (Ahl, 2006). Although Gartner (1985) introduced the notion of entrepreneurship as a process of venture creation,

this creation process is located within external factors (variable models) that determine the venture creation within an economic outcome.

Fourth, context was acknowledged in the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship. However, context was theorised within the objectivist and positivist thinking patterns. From a psychological perspective, context referred to the demographics background of an entrepreneur and was identified as factors that determine entrepreneurial actions; while the behavioural approach addressed the context in terms of external factors in the environment that also determine the behaviour of an entrepreneur, such as pull and push factors (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). Hence, culture was acknowledged on a later stage and was researched also from the behavioural perspective. The research carried out from this angle studied the impact of culture on entrepreneurial behaviour (Low and MacMillan, 1988). At this stage, culture is dichotomised as either entrepreneurial or not entrepreneurial (Javillonar and Peters, 1973) where entrepreneurial cultures are based on set of criteria of (Hofstede, 1980) that impact entrepreneurial behaviour (Hayton et al., 2002).

Fifth, and going back to the impact of the first tenet, theoretically and conceptually, the term entrepreneurship is defined as fixed and was limited in its economic function (except Gartner, 1985). It is treated as a variable (Ogbor, 2000); as are all the other concepts such as culture, gender and experience, among others (Ahl, 2006). This pattern of thinking has guided the scope and directions of research. Studies focused on identifying variables and developing variance-based models, which aimed at hypothesising, testing, measuring, controlling and predicating behaviours and outcomes (Ahl, 2006).

Sixth, methodologically, most of the research was survey and case study based (Minniti and Naudé, 2010) and aimed at generalising results, which implies universality. Although some have applied qualitative methods, the aim was to confirm or to explore the extent to which the assumptions match the pre-existing identified concepts and categories (Mirchandani, 1999).

These key tenets summarise the main threads of the mainstream entrepreneurship when the notion of women's entrepreneurship started to develop as a field. These tenets became the yardstick of women's entrepreneurship research.

3.3.2 The field of women's entrepreneurship

Women's entrepreneurship as an area of interest entered the field of entrepreneurship research in the 1970s and 1980s. The early research on women entrepreneurs was conducted in the US and Canada, then the UK and some countries in Europe such as France and Germany, among others (Minniti and Naudé, 2010; Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic, 2013). The interest began when the number of women owning businesses started to increase in those countries, and they were reported to face more challenges than their male counterparts (Neider, 1987).

As the field of entrepreneurship was established, the early studies on women's entrepreneurship focused on challenges based on the established theories. Studies compared the 'new' women entrepreneurs to the 'old' men entrepreneurs (Mirchandani, 1999). Hence, the interest in women's entrepreneurship grew even more when the number of women entrepreneurs despite being on the rise, remained behind in comparison with the number of men entrepreneurs (Carter et al., 1997).

In the late 1990s, women's entrepreneurship became a well-established field and gained recognition (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Simultaneously, feminist scholars, such as Mirchandani (1999) among others, entered the field and raised questions and challenges against many aspects of women's entrepreneurship, such as the normative assumptions, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches. The entrance of feminist theory, especially presented in the work of Mirchandani (1999), has challenged the mainstream research in women's entrepreneurship. This in turn has taken the field in different and new directions in contemporary women's entrepreneurship studies.

Against this background, and while reviewing the history of women's entrepreneurship literature, one can divide research into women's entrepreneurship into two phases: mainstream 1970s–1990s and contemporary critiques from 2000 to date. I have presented and summarised the main threads in the mainstream literature in the above section. In the following section, I cover the contemporary critiques in women's entrepreneurship studies, in which I highlight the key issues brought to the fore by feminist and critical scholars. In light of these critiques, I turn to critical entrepreneurship studies, where my thesis is located. In alignment with critical entrepreneurship debates, I expand on the theoretical approach that I have presented in chapter one, and propose how I intend to apply it in my thesis.

3.3.3 Contemporary critiques in women's entrepreneurship research

Throughout the last three decades, women's entrepreneurship research has developed and became a field of its own by the 1990s. I here draw on the seminal work of Mirchandani (1999) where she reviewed the mainstream studies on women's entrepreneurship from a feminist and constructionist perspective. I have drawn three key themes that include the main dominant trends in the mainstream studies on women's entrepreneurship research. The

dominant trends were developed simultaneously and fuel one another. The three themes developed in this study are: first, similarities, differences and comparisons; second, barriers and challenges; and third, the normative model of women's entrepreneurship.

Overall, the epistemological and theoretical background of mainstream women's entrepreneurship followed the research fashion at that period of time. Concepts were defined in fixed terms (entrepreneurship in its economic role) and treated as variables. The underlying ideology was built on objective epistemology and positivist approaches which were considered the legitimate criteria for producing knowledge (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006). Methodologically, studies were driven by statistical significance in research; even the qualitative approaches aimed to confirm the existing pre-defined categories, which reflects the objective and positivist mode of thinking despite the methods used (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). With this in mind, the following themes are developed on this foundation. Moreover, these themes represent the foundation of how women entrepreneurs were studied until fairly recently.

Similarities, differences and comparisons

Following the research fashion, the early research on women's entrepreneurship started based on the personality-traits psychological perspectives, which focused on identifying who are women entrepreneurs (e.g. Birley et al., 1987) or how these women entrepreneurs are different in comparison to men entrepreneurs (e.g. Masters and Meier, 1988). The benchmark and the point of reference of that early research are based on the existing personal-trait and behavioural models in mainstream entrepreneurship literature, which were primarily developed on men entrepreneurs' experience (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006). Consequently, women entrepreneurs were identified based on the normative male models.

This has resulted in comparing women to men in terms of how entrepreneurial women are (Neider, 1987; Cromie and Birley, 1992).

Under the same logic, research focused on identifying differences and similarities between the two sexes (e.g. Hisrich, 1989), perhaps similarities more than differences (e.g. Birley, 1989; Smith et al., 1992). The differences were researched in terms of personality traits (e.g. Hisrich, 1989), and included motives (e.g. Buttner and Moore, 1997), different network approaches (e.g. Aldrich et al., 1989), skills and accessibility to resources, and barriers to success (e.g. Buttner and Rosen, 1992).

By focusing on the characteristics of women entrepreneurs' traits and behaviours, and in comparison with men entrepreneurs, these studies have resulted in portraying women as less entrepreneurial. Women are portrayed as an under-performing group, less growth-oriented, and risk-averse, concentrated in low-status businesses and low-paid work (Minniti, 2009). This in turn has resulted in developing models, recommendations and other suggestions to enhance women's performance, and to capitalise on their potential capabilities (e.g. Aldrich, 1989). The results suggested that women entrepreneurs need to adopt masculine qualities, such as assertiveness (e.g. Aldrich, 1989), decisiveness, ambition and independence (e.g. Stevenson, 1990), as feminine qualities are described as less or non-entrepreneurial (e.g. Chaganti, 1986).

The whole idea of masculine qualities that featured and flourished in women's entrepreneurship mainstream research was influenced by the Bem (1981) Sex Role Inventory developed in psychology. Bem's inventory implies that each sex has typical qualities associated with their gender. For example, masculine qualities are ambitious, assertive,

dominant and individualistic, among others; while feminine qualities are gentle, loyal, caring, sensitive to the needs of others and sympathetic, among others.

This has reflected on mainstream research in entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship; masculine qualities are associated and depicted as entrepreneurial (Cromie and Birley, 1992) while feminine qualities are depicted as less desired for entrepreneurship. Thus, entrepreneurship is depicted as masculine; and an entrepreneur although not explicitly expressed, is perceived naturally to be a man (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006).

The implication of this sex-role (or as used to be called in that period, gender) has affected how women's entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship were researched. Studies mostly resulted in recommending and describing prescriptions for women entrepreneurs to develop certain behaviours to become entrepreneurs (Goffee and Scase, 1985), for example, to become assertive and develop more business-oriented networking (Aldrich, 1989), in other words, to mimic masculine qualities in order to become the ideal entrepreneur (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006).

Based on the differences between the sexes, another attempt in research was to typologise women entrepreneurs based on a sex-role approach. Goffee and Scase (1985) proposed four types of women entrepreneurs: conventional, innovative, domestic and radical. The conventional women entrepreneur is the women who accepts and fulfils her conventional domestic role while fulfilling the requirements of her entrepreneurial career. The innovative one is devoted to her entrepreneurial career but rejects her domestic role. The domestic women entrepreneur is a woman who prioritises her domestic role at the expense of her

entrepreneurial career. However, the radical is a woman who is not committed to either, not to her conventional gender role, nor to her entrepreneurial career. This model was proposed and applied to explain the motivation behind women's intention to become an entrepreneur, and resulted in that the typology views the entrepreneurial as the 'innovative', which rejects her sex-role, and by doing so, she rejects what is natural to her sex. This study is an example of studies attempting to explain the differences between women entrepreneurs and men entrepreneurs based on the differences between men and women's fixed gender roles.

Most of the studies based on gender differences concluded by identifying gender-related factors that impact women entrepreneurial performance and behaviour (e.g. Cromie and Birley, 1992). Thus, research provided factor-based models which are built on causal variables and correlations. They suggest that if factors are changed, the performance of women will change accordingly (e.g. Cliff et al., 2005). Hence, issues that appeared only in women entrepreneurs' experience were categorised as gender-related issues, such as family. Accordingly, research treated family as a factor affecting women entrepreneurs only (e.g. Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Stoner et al., 1990).

Challenges and barriers

Mirchandani (1999) argues that although most of the identified barriers were structural based on gender differences, the mainstream studies promoted that as the role of women and her personality to overcome and remove barriers faced (Mirchandani, 1999).

The mainstream literature depicted women entrepreneurs – who are Western – as an under-performing group, less growth-oriented and risk-averse, concentrated in low-status businesses, low paid work, limited growth and discontinuous work (Minniti, 2009). Thus, the central focus of the studies in barriers and challenges was around the individual's capabilities

to overcome barriers. Studies resulted in recommendations for women to take action, for example, suggestions to increase their economic growth (e.g. Loscocco et al., 1991). Studies pointed out that women hold limited experience in industry which limits their capabilities (e.g. Boden and Nucci, 2000), on top of family commitments that constrain women in developing their business (e.g. Stoner et al., 1990). These factors result in limiting women to low-status and low-income enterprises (Minniti, 2009). In similar vein, and based on the sex-role typology, Goffee and Scase (1985) suggest that women need to be less conventional in their gender role, and need to be committed to the requirements of their entrepreneurial career in order to achieve economic growth. Thus, women in the 'innovative' typology are ideal, and the 'radical' are most likely to fit with entrepreneurial success.

Another example of challenges that is identified as faced by women is network. This challenge is identified as a barrier to women entrepreneurship. One of the early and widely cited works in women's entrepreneurship literature is the study of Aldrich (1989). Aldrich stated that the way women network is by developing strong personal ties without utilising them for business goals, which makes women's networks rather ineffective. In his view, men are more assertive in their personal network and capitalise their network effectively to achieve business goals. Therefore, Aldrich (1989) suggests that women need to follow men's steps in this regard.

Under the same logic, Hisrich (1989) offers a prescription for women entrepreneurs in order to become successful in entrepreneurship. For example, women need to gain more experience in financial issues, sufficient education in technical and business-related subjects, learn to delegate and manage family responsibilities and demands, and develop a support system.

As noted, despite the barriers being identified as faced by women entrepreneurs only, the solutions were developed based on and in reference to men's entrepreneurship models, placing men's experience at the centre of women's entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006). Hence, these barriers are perceived as removable, which puts the responsibility on women entrepreneurs for changing their condition, overcoming barriers and becoming entrepreneurial (Kariv, 2013).

Women normative models

This line of thought was developed based on gender differences and comparison approaches. Scholars in these studies claim to handle women entrepreneurs' experience better (e.g. Chaganti, 1986). Scholars under this theme attempt to develop a women normative model or strategies of entrepreneurship. For example, and based on gender differences, some suggested to turn the qualities of women from disadvantages into advantages (e.g. Carter et al., 1997). This argument is developed on the basis that women have different leadership style, different priorities and preferences. Therefore, they are what they are (e.g. less financially orientated, preferring small-scale business) because of a choice rather than lack of capabilities (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990). For example, Lee-Gosselin and Grise (1990) argue that women intentionally prefer low-scale business because of the stability it provides, and it gives room for women to play their family and social roles in parallel with fulfilling their business requirements. Another example is a study conducted by Brush (1992) where the argument states that women's nature in forming business is related to and reflected in their role in the family. Thus the nature of their business formation is rather integrated with the family and not separated. Women in essence deal with family and business as one rather than two separate entities.

As a general note, although these models claim to be women-specific ones, the authors followed the same logic as the mainstream research, which used the experience of men in business to explain the nature of women in business (Ahl, 2006). Also, these studies have addressed the issue of family and women's domestic roles as issues essential to women's entrepreneurship, however treating this core issue as a women-specific issue. Therefore, the recommendations and strategies were suggested for women to better manage their family life in order to cope with their entrepreneurship responsibility (Stoner et al., 1990). But we must bear in mind that the literature treated all women as a homogeneous group, while actually they are referring to the experience of white Western women (Mirchandani, 1999).

3.3.3.1 Main themes in contemporary critique studies

At the end of the 1990s, the main critiques of the mainstream women's entrepreneurship literature can be summarised in the following key points.

First, historically, women's entrepreneurship research started in the West, and the interest in women entrepreneurs grew because of the increasing number of women business owners, and because of the assumptions that women face different challenges and difficulties in entrepreneurship to their male counterparts (e.g. Neider, 1987; Carter et al., 1997; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Thus, studies on women entrepreneurship were obstacle driven.

Second, women entrepreneurs were researched based on the existing theories, conceptual models and the mainstream methodologies. These existing concepts, theories and methodologies were based on men entrepreneurs' experiences. Thus, women entrepreneurs' experiences were researched based on and in reference to men's entrepreneurs' experiences (e.g. Chaganti, 1986; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990).

Third, the vast majority of research on women entrepreneurship focused on comparing women entrepreneurs' experience to men entrepreneurs' in the Western context. The comparison-based research focused on finding similarities, and identifying differences (e.g. Aldrich, 1989; Smith et al., 1992; Carter et al., 1997).

Fourth, these studies depicted women as an under-performing group, less growth-oriented and risk-averse, concentrated in low-status businesses, low paid work, limited growth and discontinuous work (Minniti, 2009). In other words, studies propagated women as less entrepreneurial then men, and this statement is treated as a universal fact (Mirchandani, 1999).

Fifth, the less entrepreneurial characteristic of women entrepreneurs is mostly explained in light of sex-role. The mainstream research has associated entrepreneurship with masculine qualities such as aggressiveness, decisiveness and assertiveness (Stevenson, 1990). Therefore, feminine qualities by nature are not entrepreneurial; and this is the reason why women struggle to fit into entrepreneurship (Kariv, 2013).

Sixth, research on women's entrepreneurship resulted in developing models and suggesting strategies and offering prescriptions for women to overcome barriers (e.g. Hisrich, 1989), which reflects the individualistic mind-set and neglects the structural and contextual barriers (Ahl, 2006).

Seventh, some scholars attempt to provide women-only models; this focused on turning women's disadvantaging feminine qualities into advantages in business (e.g. Chaganti, 1986). However, they have used the male normative model as a point of reference (Ahl, 2006), falling

into the same trap of placing androcentric perspectives as the foundation for women's entrepreneurship.

Eighth, based on the objectivist and positivist paradigm that was the research fashion at that time, theoretically and conceptually, research in this period defined entrepreneurship in its economic role, and it is treated as a variable; also gender is defined in the biological sex, and is treated as a variable, as every factor identified during that period was defined in fixed terms and treated as a variable (e.g. family, culture). Methodologically, studies were driven by statistical significance in research, with some attempts in qualitative approaches, which also aimed to confirm the existing pre-defined categories, theories or assumptions (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). These underlining ideologies in the mainstream research were considered as the scientific mode of legitimising knowledge (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009).

These themes represent the summary of the contemporary critiques on the mainstream research on women's entrepreneurship throughout the last three decades. The next section presents the critical entrepreneurship studies, where my thesis is located.

3.3.4 Critical entrepreneurship studies

The contemporary critical stance towards traditional entrepreneurship theory started in the 2000s; these critiques challenged that fundamental knowledge and the underlying ideology of the normative and taken-for-granted assumptions of the classic theory of entrepreneurship (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Essers et al., 2010). With the influence of feminist, post-traditions standpoints, scholars in critical entrepreneurship research question the historical resistance to that narrative of development, and the hegemony of the Western narrative of

entrepreneurship in the mainstream literature (e.g. Essers, 2009). Thus, critical entrepreneurship scholars are revisiting and unpacking the epistemological and theoretical underpinning of entrepreneurship theory. These different critical post traditions are unpacking the underlying deep structure of the knowledge production system in the mainstream studies (Prasad, 2005). Although these critical stances/traditions differ in how they deal and treat knowledge, the threshold among them is that knowledge is never universal, neither objective nor value-free (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Prasad, 2005). Thus, the concerns raised are that the classic entrepreneurship theory is rather culturally biased, ethnocentric, androcentric, discriminatory and gendered (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2004, 2006; Calas et al., 2009; Hamilton, 2013; Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Galloway et al., 2015).

Within their debates the first argument is against the static and fixed definition of entrepreneurship which has been perpetuated and propagated in the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship (Howorth et al., 2005; Essers, 2009; Hamilton, 2013). As the historical overview demonstrated, the notion of entrepreneurship has changed over time. The changes that occurred to the notion reflect and represent different historical periods, thinking patterns, research ideology and fashion, research trends and interest, in addition to the economic condition, culture, political and social system of the context overall (Mirchandani, 1999; Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011).

Critical scholars argue that the traditional conceptualisation of entrepreneurship was established and developed based on certain groups' experiences, reflecting a certain culture, and a specific economy. To be more precise, the notion itself was developed in the capitalist economy and represents the Western individualistic culture. Therefore, the focus is on the economic function, and the individualistic nature of an entrepreneur. The roots of the

individualistic culture and capitalist economy shaped the notion in three main aspects: first, it positioned the values of Western culture as the basis of the notion, and used Western culture as the point of reference in approaching other cultures and groups (Javillonar and Peters, 1973). Second, Western culture appreciates individualistic values that are centred around individual behaviour over context (Ahl, 2006). Third, the attention of the research is paid only to the individuals and the economic functionality, without considering the dynamics and the complexity of the social structure, cultural norms and political contexts (Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011). These three assumptions are embedded in the classic entrepreneurship theory which in turn guided the research lens and interest in approaching other cultures and contexts.

Also, the classic theory of entrepreneurship was written by white thinkers, based on the experience of white middle-class male entrepreneurs. Thus, the mainstream entrepreneurship studies imply the white male entrepreneurs' experience as a benchmark and representative of entrepreneurial experiences worldwide (Mirchandani, 1999; Essers, 2009).

Also, from a feminist poststructuralist analysis, Ahl (2006) among others has brought the researcher's attention to the gendered nature of the text used in the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship theory. She critically examined published studies on women's entrepreneurship between 1982 and 2000 using discourse analysis and discursive practices. She points out that the early scholars of entrepreneurship promoted that an entrepreneur exhibit masculine qualities, and although not explicitly stated, that the descriptions and the language that has been used in the mainstream literature implied that the entrepreneur is assumed to be a man. Ahl (2006) also demonstrated that women's entrepreneurship studies

have promoted male-gendered concepts, measures and entrepreneurial attitudes in studying women entrepreneurs. In this regard, Ahl and Nelson (2015) argue that women's entrepreneurship research reproduced discriminatory language towards women by reproducing male-based conceptual frameworks and using gendered language. This argument has been supported by feminist and critical entrepreneurship scholars who have presented and unpacked how language is gendered in the mainstream studies (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Essers, 2009).

The above discussion takes me to the gender debate and issues in critical women's entrepreneurship studies. In the mainstream literature, gender was treated with an essentialist perspective, as highlighted in the theoretical underpinning in the first chapter. So was any given notion in entrepreneurship studies before the contribution of feminist and sociological studies on gender in entrepreneurship (e.g. Mirchandani, 1999; Essers, 2009), and the contemporary critical perspectives on entrepreneurship studies overall; where any given notion, is treated as a social construct (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Fletcher, 2007).

Within the feminist debate, Mirchandani (1999) argues that gender in the early studies of women's entrepreneurship is treated as biological essentialism. Gender is defined with and limited only to biological sex, which categorises people as male or female (Acker, 1990). This binary concept of gender is used widely as a variable in the mainstream entrepreneurship research before the contribution of feminist theory. The sex-role has been applied in some studies to explain only the differences in gender performance in entrepreneurship; more precisely, to explain the under-performance of women in entrepreneurship in comparison to their male entrepreneur counterparts (Mirchandani, 1999).

Feminist scholars argue that this traditional binary perspective of gender has dismissed other important issues such as cultural practice and social norms that interact in the experience of entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2004; Sayce and Acker, 2012). Also, recent critiques assert that other significant social categories are also excluded, such as race, class and ethnicity. These social categories intertwine and play out in entrepreneurship experience that has been neglected in the mainstream literature (Essers et al., 2010).

In addition, the mainstream research dealt with and promoted women as one group. With the influence of post-traditions, contemporary feminist scholars argue that women are a heterogeneous group. Thus, homogenising women's entrepreneurial experience is privileging certain groups of women over other women of colour and race (e.g. Harvey, 2005; Essers, 2009; Mavin and Grandy, 2012). Research on women from non-Western contexts, women of colour, and women from different cultures is scarce, with few recent exceptions (e.g. Dhaliwal, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Essers et al., 2010; Mordi et al., 2010). However, most of the studies on non-Western women are approached through the traditional research models and methodologies (Minniti and Naudé, 2010), which falls into the same trap of comparison studies with their Western women counterparts, that are already criticised for using androcentric models as the standard in entrepreneurship research (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). The call for including the experience of non-Western women on the theorising level is encouraged by critical entrepreneurship scholars (Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Essers, 2009). In broader terms, the need to invent or re-create different theoretical approaches that enable creativity, flexibility and encourage new perspectives and insights are much needed in entrepreneurship studies in order to capture the complexity of the realities

of entrepreneurship that is neglected in the mainstream literature (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Fletcher, 2007; Steyaert, 2007).

As noted, the problem seems to be on the theoretical level of conceptualising notions such as entrepreneurship, gender, culture, religion and others. As I have illustrated in the theoretical underpinning section in chapter one, I develop my study on the social constructionist theoretical perspective, which is an anti-essentialism and critical stance that treats any given notion as culturally made and socially constructed (Stead, 2004). The impact of social constructionist perspective on entrepreneurship research is not only on the theorising level, it impacts the methods and research approaches. As discussed in chapter one, the social constructionist theoretical perspective started to feature in the study of entrepreneurship more recently, and women entrepreneurship more specifically (Bruni et al., 2004; Essers, 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). I have had introduced the key points of my theortical framework in chapter one; which includes the social construction of meanings and practices within their context. In the following sub-section, I expand in more detail the idea of practcies in meaning construction of entreprenureship. The idea I present below is proposed and encouraged by critical entreprenurship scholars (e.g. Bruni et al., 2004; Essers, 2009).

3.3.4.1 Entrepreneurship as social doing

Expanding on the social constructionism perspective of practice, West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) developed the idea of *social doing*. Social doing is the process of practices that carries cultural and social meanings. Culture in this regard is seen as a form of doing that manifests its meaning through practice (Carter and Bolden, 2012). Therefore, everything we are comes

in as form of doing, rather than being. In other words, we are who we are by the things we do, not only by the things we say, and we are always in the state of becoming.

The practices we do manifest our cultural background and meanings. These practices represent the structural and social arrangements in a given society. These cultural meanings determine the appropriate code of conduct of practices, which are considered the normative behaviour within a given society. West and Zimmerman (2009) argue that although these cultural practices are carried and performed by individuals, they are structural and institutional. These practices and the meanings are historically shaped and were formulated through different periods of time. These practices are initiated and shaped by individuals, however, throughout time, these practices became institutions; and they are internalised and inherited among a group. After becoming established institutions, they shape individuals' thinking, behaviour and social relations (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Although West and Zimmerman (1987) original work was developed based on the idea of gender as a social doing, they later expanded their work and included other social doings such as race, ethnicity and class (West and Fenstermaker, 1995).

Under the same logic of 'doing gender', they propose that these social categories surface in forms of practices and relationships that are constituted by the social institutions. They suggest that individuals 'do difference' by creating differences among themselves according to the social and structural arrangements they live in and part of. These social categories play out simultaneously and cannot be separated, but the significance of some may overshadow others under certain structural circumstances (West and Zimmerman, 2009).

Developing on the logic of social doing, scholars have included other issues such as cultures (Carter and Bolden, 2012), religious affiliations (Essers, 2009) and entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2004; Essers et al., 2010).

Before expanding on the idea of social doing in entrepreneurship, I first present the original work on gender as doing.

Informed by enthnomethodological ideas in the discipline of sociology, West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) proposed the notion of 'gender as doing'; they differentiate between sex, sex category and gender. They define sex based on biological classification that labels one as female and male, while sex category is the display that one exhibits to align with the biological sex criteria, such as behaviour and clothing. Thus, gender is the culturally shared and accepted behaviour that is expected from each sex. In other words, they argue that the traditional sex category is expected to indicate sex. However, changing the way one dresses, behaves and interacts might change the way one is perceived in the society. Meaning, if one exhibits certain displays and practices that are culturally associated with a certain sex, then one can manipulate or create a confusion about one's sex. Thus, one's sex display does not necessarily indicate one's sex. In other words, gendered shared meanings and practices that are associated with each sex can be imitated and accomplished.

Gender practices are cultural and social. Meaning, there are cultural and social codes of what is considered as 'normal', 'natural' and 'appropriate' behaviours and practices that one should exhibit based on one's sex. It is therefore culturally based and socially constructed within a given context; which suggests gender is no longer a universal notion. For example, what is

perceived as feminine or masculine reflects cultural and social understanding which varies across cultures.

Doing gender includes certain culturally acceptable practices that individuals carry to identify themselves and to claim membership of a certain group (e.g. women vs. men). These practices are ongoing processes that formulate our social world and uphold social order. Thus, doing gender is only captured as an ongoing situated process that takes different shapes in the form of practices and within a context. Thus, gender is always in the process of 'doing' rather than 'being'.

Under this logic, there is no such thing called normal or natural in the doing perspective. Everything is learned, enacted and socialised; where there is not a pre-determined nature to human being, whether from biology, or from the environment, but rather social. Thus, the interest here is how meanings come into being through social practice (Stead, 2004).

These meanings surface in different forms such as social interactions and practices, rather than as absolute detached facts in the mind of an individual. Individuals practise culturally and socially accepted behaviours without usually being conscious about them, and mostly without questioning (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Hence, every meaning throughout an individual's life is culturally made and socially constructed, that is originated and fuelled from the context, starting from the views and thoughts one holds about the self and the world, and includes social conducts, practices and interactions with individuals, objects and life. In this logic, every word one says or thinks one holds stems from the context and is embedded culturally and rooted historically (Stead, 2004).

In this regard, the local understanding of gender can be captured through social practices that individuals exhibit that are considered as culturally suitable to their sex category. These practices are formed, produced and reproduced through individuals practising them within a given society; they are institutionalised and supported by historical and structural circumstances (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Thus, doing gender represents the social arrangements that reflect social structure and order. Therefore, understanding gender doing opens windows to explore and examine the hierarchy and the social order and individuals' position, and accordingly, how they practise their roles within the social structure and order. Thus, individuals' experiences and interpretations can be analysed through the gender (doing). In this regard, the gender doing perspective enables the researcher to delve into the culture and the society and the meanings that shape peoples' minds and practices.

Nevertheless, if gender can be done then it can be redone or undone. While doing implies engaging in the normative culturally accepted gender behaviour, redoing/undoing refers to "a change in the normative conceptions to which members of particular sex categories are held accountable" (West and Zimmerman, 2009, p. 118). In this regard, West and Zimmerman (2009) suggest that doing gender is mainly institutional and supported historically by social circumstances; thus, a change in the historical and social circumstances may weaken some practices and allow change in normative behaviour, which is redoing of gender. However, this change must be acknowledged by the group members and accepted socially; which means even redoing is within and conditioned by social acceptance or otherwise the old normative behaviours reassert themselves, as stated by Hirst and Schwabenland (2017),

> Such changes have to be granted by members of the collective as well as being taken up by the members of the category whose norm-orientation has changed. If this acceptance is not granted, or the changes not acknowledged, then the 'undoing' of gender is not accomplished and the prevailing normative conceptions can reassert themselves. (p. 3)

Individuals reproduce and maintain these social institutions in order to maintain social order that uphold their society; therefore, the social acceptance is prevailing in change. Hence, individuals understand the meanings behind these taken-for-granted practices (Lock and Strong, 2010). Therefore, Garfinkel (1967) suggests that studying social practices requires an insider who understands the logic behind these practices (cited in Lock and Strong, 2010); and this is where reflexivity becomes crucial in this kind of research (Lock and Strong, 2010; Shaw, 2010).

However, expanding on the structural and social arrangements that shape social doings, and that change as a result of a combination of change in social structure and social acceptance; thus, the importance of the context becomes significant. The contextual influences shape the doings, and the significance of each and which doing are important as the doing itself (Lock and Strong, 2010). Therefore, the practices can only be understood within the context they occur in (e.g. Steyaert, 1997, 2007).

The form of knowledge that can be drawn from this logic makes us go beyond the meanings we hold and express, to the meanings that we embody through our practices (Carter and Bolden, 2012). Both are related, shape and shaped by each other. As mentioned, even the meanings we hold within social constructionist thinking are not a property of our own, and do not reside in our mind in isolation from the world we live in; meanings are constructed through the cultural resources that are available to us through the world that we live in

(Andrews et al., 2013). Hence, we come to know what we know through action, interaction, practices and our relationship with the surroundings (Chase, 2005; Carter and Bolden, 2012; Andrews et al., 2013).

Within the entrepreneurship field, contemporary critical scholars have applied the social doing approach to entrepreneurship, and consider entrepreneurship as a form of social doing (Bruni et al., 2004; Essers et al., 2010). What is considered to be entrepreneurial is gained through individuals' relationships with their surroundings such as family, school and media (Steyaert, 1997). Thus, entrepreneurial practices are gained through socialisation and enactment within a given society (García and Welter, 2013). Entrepreneurial practices embody the cultural meanings of how entrepreneurship notion is perceived, understood and how it should be practised (Bruni et al., 2004).

Studying entrepreneurship through practices, Steyaert (2007) calls it 'entrepreneuring'; he defines it as "a travelling concept, as a potential space for theorizing and undertake conceptual experimentations in relation to the idea of process" (p. 471); which can be captured through the entrepreneurial practices that are exhibited by individual within their context. These practices are only understood in the context in which they occur (Steyaert, 1997, 2007; Fletcher, 2007).

Hence, entrepreneurial practices become inseparable from the gender carrying them (Bruni et al., 2004). Entrepreneurship is constructed and takes shape by the cultural and social practices exhibited by the gender doing it. Thus, gender is done through the act of entrepreneurship and vice versa (Bruni et al., 2004; Essers, 2009).

Moreover, gender practices appear less evident than entrepreneurial practices due to the traditional perspective of gender as being rather than doing (Bruni et al., 2004). The being perspective of gender is the traditional perspective that treated gender as a biological essentialism, which limited gender only to biological sex, male or female (Acker, 1990). This binary perspective of gender has been widespread in mainstream entrepreneurship research before the contributions of feminist theory (Mirchandani, 1999). Feminist scholars argue that this traditional binary perspective of gender has dismissed other important issues such as culture and social norms that interact in the experience of entrepreneurship (Mirchandani, 1999; Bruni et al., 2004). These accepted cultural practices define the appropriate behaviours that are expected from individuals and define their group membership. Applying this perspective equips me to pay close attention to the cultural practices and meanings that are embodied in entrepreneurial practices in Omani culture.

Within the logic of multiple social doing, the logic of doing cannot be merely limited to gender and entrepreneurship (Essers, 2009), despite gender being the most noticeable social category (Shields, 2008). For example, Essers and Benschop (2009) discuss how religious affiliation has played out in the act of entrepreneurship among immigrant Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. Their study highlights other social categories on one hand, and supports the position that the significance of any social category is situationally based on the structural arrangement and social circumstances of a given context (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). With this in mind, I explore the experience of Omani women entrepreneurs with an open mind of other possible emerging social doings. As an Omani myself, I speculate they might be others such as tribal and family identity, and new insights in cultural practices in entrepreneur-ing and gender doings.

Given the significance and the sensitivity of gender in Arab culture, positioning gender as doing offers an alternative perspective on studying women's entrepreneurship that deals with the complexity of gender in the Arab context. Women's issues in the Arab Middle East are both complex and private (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Halldórsdóttir, 2014). In some of the colonial literature, Arab women are depicted as oppressed and suppressed by the patriarchal Arab culture and religion; thus positioning Arab women as passive victims, inferior and subordinate (Saliba, 2000; Golley, 2004). Arab feminists argue that this widely spread Arab women stereotype is merely a projection based on issues developed on Western women's experiences; studies on Arab women are mainly approached within a Eurocentric framework, and the indigenous voice of Arab women about their own experience is missing (Ahmed, 2001; Abu-Lughod, 2001; Mahmood, 2001). Calls are made by Arab feminists and feminist scholars to bring Arab women's subjective interpretation about their own experience to the fore in research (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 2001; Mahmood, 2001). Although many post-colonialist, Arab feminist and cultural anthropologist studies have focused on religion, culture and politics – which are the main contested powers that dominate Arab women's lives – the need to expand research and include work issues and entrepreneurship is a must as these are inseparable issues and have a direct influence on Arab women's contemporary lives (Tlaiss, 2014; Sidani, 2016).

Studies on Arab women entrepreneurs are scarce, with oversimplified views on culture and the complexity of the social reality that Arab women live, e.g. Jamali (2009), Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010) and Naguib and Jamali (2015) as demonstrated in the next section.

I suggest applying the logic of social doing in the Arab context will capture these cultural practices and the contextual influences that shape them, from women's subjective

interpretation of their practices and the contextual influences that shape those practices, through the co-construction between us. This will open a new way of conceptualising and examining the notion of entrepreneurship based on the experiences of Omani women entrepreneurs within their context. It will also provide a theoretical platform for other possible social doings that have not been discovered yet.

Thus, I have chosen to explore practices and the meanings of them within Omani context through two ways: first, capturing practices through the perspective of individuals practising them, and bring their view and interpretation of these practices. Second, by contextualising these practices through developing socially constructed contextual influences that shape those practices, and again, from the perspective of individuals living them.

Although the logic of social doing is developed in the Western research, this perspective offers flexibility and an unconventional perspective (Lock and Strong, 2010); it is not determined by any pre-determined experience nor seeks any comparison. Besides, it offers a new way of seeing, and offers flexibility in exploring and describing. It pays attention to the cultural meanings and practices and opens up new ways of theorising and exploring local meanings that are specific to time and space. Thus, how the logic of social doing will play out in the Omani context sounds interesting; presumably, new insights might emerge from the field that might not be captured with traditional approaches.

By doing so, this thesis brings the views and the subjective interpretation of Omani women entrepreneurs on their experience to the forefront; it also brings a contextualised and localised view of constructing the notion of entrepreneurship based on the living experience

of my participants, in collaboration with my own knowledge and interpretation as an Omani woman.

With this in mind, I turn in the second part to review the literature on Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship in the next section. I explore what is available about Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs, and review how studies have approached the notion and the group. I intend to demonstrate how studies on Arab women entrepreneurship are Western-led, and accordingly, limited. I also discuss the limitations and the problems associated with these limitations. My objectives are: a) to show what the literature on Arab women's entrepreneurship offers; and b) to draw from different fields how the literature on Arab women's entrepreneurship fell short in capturing significant issue in Arab women's life. At the end of this next part, I discuss the problems associated with these limitations in the emergent issues section and locate my theoretical underpinning for the study.

3.4 Part Two: Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship

During the last decade, studies on women from non-Western contexts have started to feature in women's entrepreneurship research. Against the above mentioned, the next sub-section offers an overview on studies on Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship. The aim of this review is to explore what the available studies have to offer, and to examine how these studies are carried out theoretically, conceptually and methodologically. Accordingly, and with the theoretical lens of this thesis in mind, the final section draws the key issues arising from this review.

3.4.1 Overview

Research on entrepreneurship in non-Western contexts is a vastly under-researched area with very few attempts; the available studies provided are only published within the last ten years (e.g. Afrin et al., 2008; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Little is known about women of colour, different cultures, classes, races, religions, ethnic groups, migrants and immigrants in entrepreneurship research; these groups and their experience have only been brought recently to the forefront of entrepreneurship research (e.g. Harvey, 2005; Dhaliwal and Kangis, 2006; Essers et al., 2010).

The interest in non-Western contexts is mainly driven by economic-rationality (Ennis, 2015). Women are treated as untapped potential economic resources; thus, research focused on unleashing the economic potential of women to contribute to national economic development (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Minniti, 2009; Minniti and Naudé, 2010).

Globally, entrepreneurship is promoted as a strong economic engine that stimulates innovation, creates employment and wealth, and increases the capabilities of the local workforce (Perren and Jennings, 2005; Ennis, 2015). This Western model of entrepreneurship has been propagated internationally as a universal concept that can fit everywhere and is suitable to everyone (Hamilton, 2013; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Entrepreneurship is promoted by international organisations and consultancy companies as the ideal solution to fix the economic challenges that face developing countries; thus, governments in developing countries are advised to adopt concepts such entrepreneurship to solve unemployment and economic diversification (Ennis, 2015). Governments in Gulf countries, among other developing countries, drew up policies and initiated supportive entrepreneurship programmes to encourage locals to join entrepreneurship; especially women (Goby and

Erogul, 2011). The main purpose of governments' steps towards entrepreneurship is to deal with issues such as unemployment (Afrin et al., 2008; Minniti and Naudé, 2010; Goby and Erogul, 2011). Also, based on the individualistic-centrality, the representation of entrepreneurship in the global media is playing a role in promoting entrepreneurship as a desirable career choice that creates wealth, and changes and transform one's life (Javillonar and Peters, 1973; Danish and Smith, 2012; Hamilton, 2013; Verduijn and Essers, 2013).

As mentioned in the previous part, the early studies on women from non-Western contexts had resulted in comparative studies (Javillonar and Peters, 1973; Aldrich, 1989; Watson, 2002; Minniti and Naudé, 2010; Zeffane, 2014). The comparative studies either compared women and men from the same culture, or between women from developing countries to women in developed countries (Malach-Pines et al., 2007). For example, the dominating theme in the comparative studies between women from developing and developed countries is their motive; while women from developing countries are motivated by necessity, push factors, women in developed countries are motivated by opportunity, pull factors (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). The rate of women entrepreneurs in developing countries scored higher than women in developed countries (Brush and Cooper, 2012). The explanation provided attributes this to the differences at the macro-level of the countries' economies (Minniti et al., 2006, cited in Minniti and Naudé, 2010), where poverty and poor economic and social conditions have pushed uneducated and low-skilled women to entrepreneurship due to the lack of opportunities (Afrin et al., 2008; Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic, 2013).

Also, topics and interests were primarily identified in the Western context, and treated as globally shared issues among women (e.g. Aldrich, 1989; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Buttner and Rosen, 1992; Carter et al., 1997; Minniti, 2009). Accordingly, recommendations

are proposed on the basis of the commonality and universality of these problems. Based on the individualistic perspective and economic-rationality, these obstacles are perceived as removable and controlled based on the individual's action (Mirchandani, 1999) with little or no attention paid to the structural barriers and contextual dynamics that shape women's entrepreneurship (Baughn et al., 2006; De Bruin et al., 2007; Jamali, 2009).

More recent studies have raised the issue of the importance of context and structural barriers within the macro-economic system in a given country, such as taxation, regulations and competition policy. Hence, most of these barriers are developed within the Western structure (e.g. Welter, 2004). The mainstream studies underestimated the external factors, and overestimated the internal or the personal factors (Gartner, 1990). The Western-led research underestimated how local culture that underpins the informal and untaxed market in developing countries has shaped the entrepreneurship sector (Al-Mataani, 2017).

Nevertheless, the little attention that is given in these limited studies to the culture within the system of a country has yield interesting, yet limited results. For example, the strong role of religion, culture and social norms in countries like Saudi Arabia (Welsh et al., 2014), the political instability and war zone in the Gaza strip and West Bank (Hattab, 2012) and Lebanon (Jamali, 2009) and Palestinian women in Jordan (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). These issues among others are context-specific, which requires sensitive consideration from scholars researching these contexts, and the culture of people within these contexts. For example, as stated by some Arab scholars, culture overshadows laws and regulation in the Arab context, specifically in the case of women (Hijab, 1988; El Saadawi, 2007).

The Western research approaches fell short of capturing the sensitivity of culture and other social dynamics (Calas et al., 2009; Galloway et al., 2015). These research approaches constrained and contained context-specific issues within Western thinking and frameworks that speak the language of universality, economic functionality and individuality; which in turn undermined or dismissed the role of context and culture on women's lives (Baughn et al., 2006; De Bruin et al., 2007).

3.4.2 Women's entrepreneurship in Gulf countries

The Arab region includes 25 countries, from Oman on the shore of the Indian Ocean to Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean. These countries share the Arabic language and Islamic religion (Omair, 2008). Mostly, research on the Arab region attempts to homogenise Arab culture; however, there are major political, economic and sectorial differences within the Arab region (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2012). Hence, the Arab region shares some overarching problems and interests, but there are differences within. One of those shared problems is the condition of women in Arab contemporary lives (Hijab, 1988; Sidani, 2016).

The Arab region can be divided into two main areas: first, the Gulf countries that include Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman. These Gulf countries share culture, history and similar customs. These countries have formulated the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf, except for Iraq. The second group is the rest of the Arab countries that have different economic and political conditions; such as Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, among others.

Primarily, research on Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs within the Arab region is scarce (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). The first study dates back to 2002 with limited progress (around 25 articles covering all Arab regions). In terms of geographical coverage, the largest share of current studies focussed on the wealthy Gulf countries, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with less attention paid to non-oil-based economies such as Egypt or Morocco.

Generally, the majority topics of interest tend to cover a few very broad topics, with little diversity or depth. This has resulted in lacking breadth and depth in tackling the authenticity of Arab women's entrepreneurship experience (Tlaiss, 2014) offering an oversimplified image of the complexity of the local culture and the dynamics of the context for Arab women (Jamali, 2009; Naguib and Jamali, 2015), falling into the trap of imposing Eurocentric perspectives on Arab women (Saliba, 2000; Golley, 2004).

Despite Arab women's condition being considered one of the worst in the world in terms of discriminative rights and inequalities (Moghadam, 2003; Metcalfe, 2011; Sidani, 2016), studies on Arab women have approached this group and this context with the same traditional Western models of women's entrepreneurship. Thus, Arab women entrepreneurs' issues are identified based in the Western studies, and are treated as international and shared issues.

Hence, and despite the political conflict and instability in the Arab region, very few and recent studies have addressed the significance of the political aspect in shaping Arab women's entrepreneurship experience (e.g. Hattab, 2012). The rest of the studies have neglected the political aspect in women's entrepreneurship, despite studies in post-colonialism, Arab

feminism, culture and anthropology studies having demonstrated that Arab women's condition is a political matter (e.g. Kandiyoti, 1991; Odeh, 1993; Taraki, 1995).

Theoretically and conceptually, the majority of studies on Arab women's entrepreneurship have applied the static and objective forms of concepts, except one recent study, namely Naguib and Jamali (2015). The rest have treated concepts as variables, even if not mentioned explicitly. Theoretically, entrepreneurship is defined on economic-rationality, and gender is defined as biological sex. In addition, concepts such as culture are merely a variable and have not been defined theoretically, except in very few studies (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Tlaiss, 2014), which defined culture based on Hofstede's taxonomy framework (1980).

The interests in studying Arab women entrepreneurs are economically driven, obstacle-oriented and individual-centrality (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Tlaiss, 2014; Welsh et al., 2014); despite some studies having highlighted that women in the Gulf are driven by personal motives, not economic ones (Hijab, 1988; Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Itani et al., 2011). Generally, studies have applied pre-defined themes, concepts and measures that are primary identified for Western women's entrepreneurship literature (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005).

Despite the huge emphasis placed on the role of cultural practices, customs and social norms in determining women's entrepreneurial experience in all the reviewed studies, these studies did not provide satisfactory theoretical examination and treatment (Naguib and Jamali, 2015; Tlaiss, 2015). Thus, contemporary scholars –mostly Arabs – claim that the current studies on Arab women entrepreneurship provide a circumscribed image of Arab women's reality and underestimated their cultural and social realities (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Tlaiss, 2014).

Methodologically, although the majority of the studies applied qualitative approaches, they have followed the mainstream research pre-defined Western perspectives on women entrepreneurship (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Contemporary scholars have argued that the traditional research has provided relative breadth but lack of in-depth analysis of women of colour, and different cultures (Marlow and Patton, 2005; Betters-Reed et al., 2007; Essers et al., 2010). Issues such as the complexity and the dynamics of social factors in the entrepreneurship experiences are raised as crucial elements in women's entrepreneurial experience (Baughn et al., 2006; De Bruin et al., 2007). Contemporary scholars on women's entrepreneurship argue that the traditional analytical approaches fall short of capturing the complexity of contemporary life; and with the advancement of research approaches and analytical tools, scholars call for adapting more creative, advanced methodologies and perhaps more sophisticated analytical frameworks to handle and capture the sensitivity and the dynamics of the context and the social reality (Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011; Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

However, in reviewing the current literature on Arab Muslim women in the Gulf countries, I present in the next sub-section an overview of the topic covered and the results of these studies. By doing so, the sub-section will give the reader a flavour of the research trends and results offered by Western research ideology. The final section is the concluding remarks which highlight the key issues raised by this review and link them with theoretical underpinning of this study in order to draw the foundational background of the discussion this thesis intends to argue.

3.4.2.1 Topics researched

Barriers, Constraints and Challenges

The majority of current studies are obstacle-driven (Tlaiss, 2014). Several articles (e.g. McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010) on Arab women's entrepreneurship have identified shared barriers, constraints and challenges among Arab women entrepreneurs, whether these studies are quantitative, qualitative or review papers. The difference is in the order of significance of these barriers, which vary among countries. I have listed below the shared overarching barriers in the order of significance.

Institutional barriers include economic and political instability, lack of access to formal capital and financial support, lack of formal network and lack of governmental support (e.g. Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Goby and Erogul, 2011).

Socio-cultural barriers include cultural constraints, cultural practices, gender stereotyping family resistance, patriarchal family structure, strict gender roles, women's traditional role as a mother and a wife, work–family balance and negative attitudes towards working women (e.g. Al-Riyami et al., 2002; Madichie and Gallant, 2012).

Personal reasons include lack of self-confidence and fear of failure (e.g. Danish and Smith, 2012).

Only two recent studies have applied advanced theoretical, methodological and analytical frameworks in order to overcome the oversimplification in dealing with issues such as culture, religion, social norms and structural barriers (namely Tlaiss, 2014; Naguib and Jamali, 2015). These recent studies aimed at explaining, interpreting and capturing the complexity of these factors and how they together shape Arab women's experience in entrepreneurship.

Although the barriers identified in these recent studies have supported the previous results (e.g. McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010), their contribution is in providing different and new angles in capturing the complexity of what constitutes Arab women's entrepreneurship. However, except for these two studies, the rest have followed the fixed, unchallenged notion of entrepreneurship, which includes economic-rationality and individualistic-centrality. The following paragraphs shed light on some of the studies to indicate how obstacles were discussed and the results of these studies.

Interestingly, studies on Omani women's entrepreneurship were the first studies to be found in the current literature on Arab women's entrepreneurship. The first two articles seem to be based on the same study but were published in two different journals. One article is based on a preliminary report and was published under the title of opportunities and challenges by Al-Riyami et al. (2002). The second is under barriers to success by McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003).

McElwee and Al-Riyami's (2003) study developed themes based on Western women's literature and some local knowledge. The themes included: 1) family support and encouragement as a positive factor; 2) women define success differently than men, which is why women stay in small-size businesses; 3) women have less access to funds; and 4) the need for a network. The results of these two studies highlighted that Omani women were hobby-oriented, and driven by personal reasons; which limited their business in the services industry and small-sized businesses with no intention to grow, and therefore less keen to seek external funds. The family support is reported as crucial, especially from a male relative such as the husband or the father. As reported, the husband and the male relatives help women with funds – if needed – paperwork and networking. In this regard, the study highlighted that men in Oman play the face of the business while women run the business. This is explained

in light of the patriarchal society, where women overcome gender discrimination of cultural practices through putting the male relative in the foreground of the business. Also, the study reported other issues that I consider important such as the gender distinction in the administrative system. Also, women felt they were more supported by the officials in the authorities than their male counterparts, for example, less time queuing and receiving more assistance. Also, the network in Oman is tribal and family-based. Omanis live by highly extensive informal relationships, which shape professional relationships. Thus, the professional network is rather personal and vice versa. The study also shed light generally on the issue of the private and public spaces of women, which constrain women's mobility in the public spaces. Finally, and although this study draws some comparisons with women in the US and the UK to confirm similarities and challenges faced, this study concluded by highlighting that the Western conceptualisation of the entrepreneur (hero and maverick) might not be adequate to a collectivist society, where family lies at the centre and social conformity is appreciated. However, the sample of the study included only highly educated professional women from Muscat who came from similar socio-economic backgrounds and seemed to be financially well-off. However, as shown in the context chapter, the term entrepreneurship is fairly new in Oman (Ennis, 2015); and the official registration prior to 2013 was business only. Given the circumstances in the Omani labour market, the question that arises here is what entrepreneurship was perceived as; and what differences it made when an official category for entrepreneurship was introduced in Oman.

In another study, and based on a combination of a literature review and international and local reports, Zeidan and Bahrami (2011) identified challenges amongst the GCC countries. Their findings assert that there are negative attitudes towards working women generally, as

culturally and socially women should not work outside their homes. The emphasis on gender role is highly practised and appreciated in the Arab Gulf countries, giving the priority to women's duty as a mother and a wife within their private premises.

Goby and Erogul's (2011) qualitative study supported the findings of the previous study, but put more weight on the lack of official support to assist women's entrepreneurship in the UAE. Based on analysing official reports and incorporated with interview, the results highlighted that the UAE government is changing by introducing new supportive programmes for women, which has resulted in a slight increase in the number of women entrepreneurs; but Goby and Erogul (2011) emphasise that the remaining problem is the culture and social norms and practices that impede women from taking advantage of these programmes.

Another qualitative study in the UAE by Itani et al. (2011) suggested that women were satisfied with their entrepreneurial life overall; but they face difficulties associated with the support programmes offered by the government. Some women reported the insufficiency of these programmes, while other women were not aware of them.

On the socio-culture level, Itani et al.'s (2011) study pointed out some interesting issues such as the problem of (in)visibility. In a conservative society like the UAE, women are not expected to be in the public arena. However, the study acknowledged this issue without digging deeper into it. Hence, the issue of visibility and problems associated with it in Gulf countries is only acknowledged in a later study by Madichie and Gallant (2012) also on women entrepreneurs in the UAE.

Based on findings from selected research reports presented by regional institutions in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, Ahmad's (2011) findings emphasise gender-specific obstacles that are

reflected in the regulatory environment. However, the findings illustrate that Saudi women were confident, educated, optimistic about the future and resourceful.

Madichie and Gallant's (2012) qualitative study explored Emirati women's experience by applying institutional theory framework. This study identified that some Islamic principles have affected the perception of women's entrepreneurship. For example; from the Islamic perspective, men are financially responsible for their family, while women's role is mother and wife. Based on this gender role, society does not take women's work seriously as their work is rather voluntary. Hence, women in the sample of this study believed that Islam does not restrict them, but it is the patriarchal society that constrains them.

Sadi and Al-Ghazali have conducted two quantitative studies (2010, 2012) on Saudi Arabia and Bahrain that indicated discriminatory practices against women in the Gulf countries are due to the deeply rooted cultural values and gender roles; which are echoed in official practices at the national level. Interestingly, some Saudi women refused to complete the questionnaire because they are not registered. The reason behind this is because they were reluctant to involve the mandatory third party – which should be a male manager – to handle their affairs and to intercede on their behalf. Instead, they use family male relatives to sort out their official matters. Also, women face cultural challenges. For example, Saudi men do not like taking orders from women, irrespective of the woman's position, or context. This issue is represented as one of the daily challenges that are faced by Saudi women entrepreneurs. Despite acknowledgment the study does not explore or examine the emergent issues further.

Despite the socio-cultural constraints and institutional barriers that were reported by all the studies on Arab women's entrepreneurship, the number of entrepreneurial women is increasing gradually in Saudi Arabia, according to Danish and Smith (2012). The reason behind this is the positive image of women entrepreneurs that is promoted through media channels. Despite the limitation of that study in terms of sample and region covered, the findings shed light on how women entrepreneurs are projected in media and perceived among the women entrepreneurs in the sample, which has not been touched upon in current research on Arab women entrepreneurship.

Welsh et al.'s (2014) quantitative study stated that women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia share the same obstacles that other Arab woman face. However, there are some distinctive barriers that are context-specific such as the obligatory permission of the *wakil*. Legally, women in Saudi Arabia need a legal intermediate who acts on her behalf with government and official entities and must be a man. The wakil has full power over the business; therefore, women partner mostly with the husband or a relative male figure to overcome this barrier.

In a more recent study, Tlaiss (2014) applied Hosftede's taxonomy of cultural values to Emirati women to understand and contextualise how these barriers unfold within this cultural framework; her argument is built on the basis that culture has been oversimplified in research dealing with Arab women, and her approach is applying Hofstead taxonomy, which is the most used cultural framework in entrepreneurship and culture (Hayton et al., 2002; Zeffane, 2014).

Tlaiss's findings stated that barriers faced by women entrepreneurs are deeply rooted in the social and cultural values and norms and practices. The findings highlighted the role of agency

that these women entrepreneurs exhibited which is presented in their ambitious and self-confident attitude. This attitude is shown through navigating and negotiating their entrepreneurial career within the restrictions of the patriarchal social structure. Findings also emphasised the significant role of family support to women in establishing and succeeding in entrepreneurship, suggesting that women who fail to gain their family's consensus are most likely to choose other career. This act of accepting is explained in the light of the collective nature of Arab society, where group conformity is highly valued. Thus, women did not break the norm, but constructed their entrepreneurship within the culturally and socially accepted manner (Tlaiss, 2014).

The final study is by Naguib and Jamali (2015) who ran a qualitative study applying a phenomenological approach and multi-level integrative analytical framework to capture the dynamic and complexity of factors shaping women's entrepreneurship in the UAE. Their results have, indeed, yielded new insights such as that patriarchal social structure is internalised among women entrepreneurs themselves; meaning women themselves hold the traditional perception of gender stereotypes, and are hostile to women breaking them. Finally, Naguib and Jamali (2015) point out that changes in the Arab countries are taking place due to exogenous factors such as financial and economic struggles and social uprising; and endogenous factors such as generational gap, urbanization and education. However, this study offered breath in explanation of barriers by locating and linking them together through a multi-level integrated framework, which resulted in new insights in viewing Arab women entrepreneurs.

Arab women from the wealthy Gulf countries are driven mainly by non-financial reasons, such as desire for independence and self-achievement (e.g. Itani et al., 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014). In the Gulf countries, and because of the oil economy, women enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, such having a domestic helper for household chores (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Itani et al., 2011). Also, locals are supported by the government to engage in the labour market through the quota system that is mentioned in the context chapter (Forstenlechner et al., 2012).

The current literature categorises motivation into pull and push factors (e.g. Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2012; Tlaiss, 2013). To recap, push factors are associated negatively with necessity-drivers that force women to enter entrepreneurship, such as unemployment; while pull factors are more opportunity-driven, personal aspirations, and associated more with choice (Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Stevenson, 1986). Based on this premise, Arab women from the Gulf are depicted as motivated by pull-factors and framed as opportunistic in the current studies (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, Omani women entrepreneurs were primarily driven by enjoyment; then gaining autonomy and self-satisfaction; while economic reasons ranked as less significant. Therefore, most of the business sectors were hobby-related (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Another exploratory study by Dechant and Al Lamky (2005) explored entrepreneurial motives between Omani women entrepreneurs and Bahraini women entrepreneurs, and found that Omani and Bahraini women were motivated mainly by opportunities, the need for achievement, self-fulfilment and the desire to help others.

Hence, all these Omani-based studies pointed out that women in Oman face limited career options in the labour market (Al-Riyami et al., 2002). This is in similarity with UAE society where institutions are gendered and the strict sex-segregation system left women with limited employment options; therefore, entrepreneurship becomes a desirable choice (Madichie and Gallant, 2012).

Support

Although acknowledged, this theme has received very little attention in terms of depth in the current research, although it played a pivotal role in Arab women entrepreneurs' experience. Support for Arab women's entrepreneurship came in three forms: first, family; second, networking; and third, governmental support. The order is presented based on the importance for women's entrepreneurship experience as reported in the current studies.

Family

Family play a crucial role in the existence of entrepreneurship in Arab women's lives. According to Tlaiss (2014), women who fail to gain their families' consensus will not take up entrepreneurship and will seek alternative choices. Hence, none of the women entrepreneurs in the current studies reported making the choice against their family's will. Instead, women kept negotiating and retrying several times until reaching family consensus (e.g. Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014).

However, most of the women entrepreneurs across all the empirical research have reported family resistance at the beginning; which made women negotiate their rights to entrepreneurship. Hence, after family consensus is granted, the resistance is transformed to positive support, such as the case of the UAE (Erogul, 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012); Saudi Arabia (Welsh et al., 2014); and Oman (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). For example, in

the case of the UAE, where the male members of the family get involved physically and emotionally in the business. Women entrepreneurs in the UAE report that they built their network based on their male family members' contacts (Erogul, 2011). The family network is reported in the case of Oman, also. Hence, the husband and the father's support is reported as crucial in the case of Oman, where women need their support to entrepreneurship to overcome gender-biased practices in a patriarchal social structure (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Also, the presence of a family member male figure legitimises women's entrepreneurial activity in the eyes of the clients and the suppliers in the UAE (Erogul, 2011). The male relative takes up the public roles and the face of the business, leaving women in the back office in the case of Oman. Another practice that was reported in Oman is that men register their business under the wife's name, but her name is used as a cover without actual involvement (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Network

Most women entrepreneurs expressed frustration with the lack of formal networks (e.g. McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Erogul, 2011; Itani et al., 2011). However, due to the collectivist nature of Arab society, especially in the Gulf countries, professional relationships are built on personal relations, family and tribal connections. People are aware of each other's family members and tribes; which in turn helps in establishing business contacts. Thus, professional relationships become personal and vice versa (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Women entrepreneurs in Erogul's (2011) empirical study have capitalised on this nature of relationships in society by turning it into a source for their business network. In Oman, women also rely on family connections to build a network for their business (McElwee and Al-Riyami,

2003). The centrality of family in network appeared very strongly and it seems that networking and capitalising on the family relationships is vital in business.

Governmental support

The lack or insufficiency of governmental support are addressed as a barrier in most the studies (e.g. Jamali, 2009; Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Welsh et al., 2014). Countries such as the UAE had introduced support programmes to encourage women's entrepreneurship (Goby and Erogul, 2011). Hence, Emirati women entrepreneurs in Itani et al.'s (2011) study criticised these governmental programmes as insufficient. Erogul (2011) argues that although government is taking the first step to improve women's conditions in society, the problem remains within the cultural mind-set that impedes women from enrolling.

3.4.3 Emergent issues

Overall, the current studies have offered an oversimplified image of Arab Muslim women's experience in the Gulf countries (Tlaiss, 2014). This above review has shown that the current studies have systematically perpetuated the Western domination of the notion of entrepreneurship, and that Arab women are studied based on Western women's experiences. Following the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship theory and practice, the majority of the current literature on Arab women's entrepreneurship in the GCC has framed notions within the essentialist perspective; such as entrepreneurship, gender, culture and religion, among others; and followed the traditional Western definition of economic-rationality and individualistic-centrality; despite acknowledging that women are not driven by economic reasons (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005) and the importance of social conformity in Arab societies (Tlaiss, 2014). Although some studies have suggested the inadequacy of the Western

conceptualisation of entrepreneurship in the GCC (e.g. McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Erogul, 2011), very few recent studies have challenged the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship and gender (e.g. Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

Although acknowledged fairly recently, scholars on entrepreneurship in the Arab context argue that entrepreneurship is a new phenomenon in the Arab world (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015). The existing literature has overlooked the newness of the concept in the Arab context (Ennis, 2015). The issue of newness, language and translation across cultures is neglected in the mainstream entrepreneurship research (Ennis, 2013). For example, Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic (2013) highlighted that there are three translations of the term entrepreneurship in the Spanish language; which has created more confusion in the concept in the Latin-American context. Thus, the issue of conceptualisation and translation has not been touched upon either in the mainstream entrepreneurship research or in the studies on Arab women entrepreneurs.

Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010) argue that entrepreneurship for Arab women plays different roles and has potential for new perspectives apart from the economic outcome. This argument is supported by critical entrepreneurship theory, feminist theory and contemporary critiques (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004; Calas et al., 2009). To recap, these critiques challenge and problematise the traditional conceptualisation of the notion of entrepreneurship and argue that entrepreneurship might hold different meanings to different people in different contexts (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008) and might play different roles for different groups (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). Critical views call for including different groups and cultures on the theorising level (Calas et al., 2009). Thus, new theoretical

foundations and creative methodological approaches are much needed that can aid the researcher to capture the complexity in entrepreneurship experience and allow the emergence of new insights, perspective and frames of entrepreneurship (Steyaert, 2007).

In the same vein of problematising concepts, notions such as Islam, culture and gender are challenging (Tlaiss, 2015). These challenges can be summarised in three key points: first, theoretically and conceptually; second, overlapping of these concepts (Essers et al., 2010); and third, methodologically and analytically (Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

The debates and arguments about Islam, culture and women in the Arab context are on-going, longitudinal, historical, political, multi-perspective, multi-discipline, complicated and controversial issues (Hutchings et al., 2012). In broad terms, studies on Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs have stated that Islam gives rights for women to education, work and doing business (Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Erogul, 2011; Hattab, 2012). Islam also designated a clear role, duty and obligations to each gender in society. Men are the breadwinners, while women are the caregivers (Erogul, 2011). This gender role has impacted the societal perceptions (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). Thus, women's work is perceived as voluntary (Madichie and Gallant, 2012) and therefore not taking seriously (Erogul, 2011).

Primarily, Madichie and Gallant (2012) among others (e.g. Tlaiss, 2014) argue that Islamic values and teaching encourage women's work in general and more specifically, entrepreneurship; on the basis that the Prophet Mohamed's wife was a trader and had her own business. However, most of the studies that focused on barriers have linked the roots of the problems to Islamic teaching (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Jamali, 2009; Itani et al., 2011) however, Arab women entrepreneurs in the sample of these studies believed that Islam

did not constrain them from pursuing entrepreneurship (e.g. Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Erogul, 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014, 2015); but it is the patriarchal interpretation of Islam (e.g. Al-Riyami et al., 2002; Madichie and Gallant, 2012).

Some of the current studies argue that the cultural practice and social norms in the Arab Middle East are considered as the main barriers to women's progression in career and entrepreneurship (e.g. Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; Al-Sadi et al., 2011; Hattab, 2012; Welsh et al., 2014). Even though some governments are changing their policy and legislative body to improve women's conditions in the labour market via entrepreneurship, women remain reluctant due to cultural practices and social norms (Erogul, 2011; Goby and Erogul, 2011). Itani et al. (2011) argue that these programmes will probably not be of any use if governments do not focus on changing the cultural mind-set of society. Goby and Erogul (2011) suggest that the government need to work on the mind-set and the culture in the Gulf if actual change in women's condition is aimed for. Naguib and Jamali (2015) argue that this hostile mind-set is internalised among women themselves. Al-Azri (2013) among others argues that governmental practices are within religious and cultural lines.

Therefore, the overlapping between Islam and culture is a challenge for scholars in this context (Madichie and Gallant, 2012). Korotayev et al. (2015) argue that there should be a distinction between Arab culture and Islam. Bernard (1994) rejects any separation between Islam and Arab Muslim societies due to the embedded historical roots of Islamic tradition in the Arab region. Smith (1980) supports this and claims that Islam cannot be dealt with as merely a religion, but rather as a dominant factor in a complex cultural milieu. Some scholars on Islam and Arab societies state that Islam shaped Arab culture (Mernissi, 1991; Badran, 2005; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Rahman, 2012); while Ahmed (1992) argues in her seminal work on

women and gender in Islam that Arab culture combines pre-Islamic Arab cultural practices that are embodied and enhanced within Islamic principles that have evolved throughout different historical periods. Also, Essers and Benschop (2009) argue that Islam cannot be confined to one society or culture; as the cultural practices under the name of Islam vary among Islamic societies; for example, Malaysia (Mohd Rhouse, 2013), Afghanistan (Bullough and Renko, 2017), Bangladesh (Afrin et al., 2008) and Iran (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Hence, studies examining the overlapping of Islam and culture in the context of entrepreneurship hardly exist (Essers and Benschop, 2009). However, and despite this paucity, the impact of Islam on Muslim women entrepreneurs is reported as significant. Muslim women have used Islam as a source of legitimacy, and incorporated Islamic values and work ethics into their business practices (Tlaiss, 2015).

The challenges seem to in theorising these notions; for example, what can be considered cultural or religious, or what can be perceived as the cultural practices of Islamic interpretations is rather confusing and challenging (Metcalfe, 2008; Hutchings et al., 2012), The majority of the current studies are based on the essentialist perspective, which in turn created challenges and limits the theoretical conceptualisation of these notions.

Thus, the critical movement in entrepreneurship calls for more holistic, contextual, sophisticated theoretical and methodological approaches in dealing with sensitivity the complexity of the studying contexts and entrepreneurship (De Bruin et al., 2007; Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011). As demonstrated above, the current studies on Arab Muslim women did not provide satisfactory theoretical examination and treatment. Thus, contemporary scholars claim that the current studies on Arab women's entrepreneurship provided a circumscribed

image of Arab women's reality and underestimated their cultural and social realities (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Tlaiss, 2014).

As also can be noted from the above review, there are some context-specific issues that are mentioned collaterally in the existing literature without further exploration or investigation. These issues might be significant, but due to the theoretical and methodological limitation, these issues are not given importance beyond acknowledgement. I summarise these issues in the following points:

First and foremost, the existing literature attempts to homogenise culture in the Arab context. Although not expressed explicitly, however, referring to Arab culture as a unified term dismisses the nuances within the Arab region (e.g. Metcalfe, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2012). For example, historically, the Arab Gulf societies are tribal-based and rely heavily on family connections; the impact of this collective nature of society has a strong impact on Arab women in the Gulf countries (Sonbol and El-Azhary, 2012). The impact of this tribal-based societies has been raised and discussed relatively in studying Arab women in management (e.g. Omair, 2008), and leadership studies (e.g. Neal et al., 2007), however, neglected in the studies of entrepreneurship.

The second issue is the political impact on women's entrepreneurship. Post-colonialism literature and Arab feminism state that the topic of women in Arab countries is a political matter (Odeh, 2010). Thus, touching upon women's issues in the Arab Middle East by default assumes delving into political terrain (Aldosari, 2016). Interestingly, none of the current studies on women in the GCC has touched upon the political aspect.

Third, gender roles: research on women entrepreneurship has addressed gender roles in Arab societies as a wife and a mother that is suggested to be designated by Islamic principles (e.g. McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Madichie and Gallant, 2012). However, these studies have not delved deeper to understand these roles and the impact on entrepreneurship. For example, a study investigating social and political changes for Arab women in the Gulf countries stated that having a child is considered a social obligation (Fakhro, 2005), which puts women under the social pressure of marriage and motherhood (Neal et al., 2005). Also, the family size and dynamics in the Arab societies are different than the West, which implies different roles within the family institution (El-Haddad, 2003). These social roles and obligation shape women's condition in the labour market (Sidani, 2005). For example, the male relative's involvement in women's business which takes different forms such as the intermediate role for external public affairs (Welsh et al., 2014), public face of the business (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003) and source of legitimacy (Erogul, 2011); all these issues raises the question of the construction of gender roles and obligations within the Arab family. Also, as mentioned earlier, women in the Arab Gulf countries depend on domestic helpers for household chores (El-Haddad, 2003; Itani et al., 2011), which suggests that women's role as a mother and a wife is taking a different shape; yet her physical existence in the private space of the house is important (Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

Also, Arab women's career is not a choice of her own (El-Haddad, 2003). Al-Bulushi (2010) highlighted that educational and career choice is a matter of the family, more precisely the father. El-Haddad (2003) adds that women's educational level has no impact on her personal and career choice within her family. Tlaiss (2014) reports that women are most likely to seek alternative career choices if her family disapprove of entrepreneurship. These points among

others have appeared in the current studies, yet were not investigated deeper. The main reasons are most likely the limited theoretical underpinning these studies have applied. Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010) argue that entrepreneurship plays a different role in Arab women's lives, and cannot be limited within the traditional static definition. In the same vein, Erogul (2011) points out that the way women in the Gulf countries carry entrepreneurship requires re-conceptualisation of the notion of entrepreneurship.

In the same vein, women in the Gulf countries are expected to seek family permission to became an entrepreneur (Madichie and Gallant, 2012); the father if not married, and the husband if married (Al-Bulushi, 2010). This practice is enforced by law in Saudi Arabia (Welsh et al., 2014) while in others it remains a cultural practice, such as the UAE and Oman (Madichie and Gallant, 2012). Tlaiss (2014) demonstrated that woman who do not achieve family consensus will most likely choose another career option. In her explanation, social conformity and cohesion overshadow personal choices. In this regard, some Arab scholars emphasise that cultural practices and social norms play a much stronger role in shaping women's behaviours than the legal system (El Saadawi, 2007; Goby and Erogul, 2011). As demonstrated, these concepts such as family, motherhood and marriage are not examined theoretically; and they are treated in reference with the experience of Western women.

Fourth, the labour market: most of the studies assumed the barriers that Arab women face in the GCC are the same shared barriers identified in the mainstream literature. Thus, there are no attempts to identify the relation between the condition of Arab women in labour markets and the entrance of entrepreneurship in the GCC. Given the quota (localisation) policies in the Gulf countries (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2011) and the gendered organisation (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2012) and relationship-based

society, where employment and business deals are based on tribal and family network (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003), these probably have influenced women's entrepreneurship in ways that have not been explored yet.

All these factors are mentioned collaterally without deeper exploration and this warrants further investigation in research of the condition of women in the labour market and the relation between the labour market, employment and entrepreneurship.

The final issue, and within gender issues, is the issue of accessibility. The culture constrains women from sharing their personal experience, especially with strangers (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Tlaiss, 2014). Foreign researchers have frequently reported problems of reaching out and accessibility to Arab women (e.g. Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Erogul, 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014). In some cases, where the gender of the researcher is a male, women entrepreneurs attended the interview with a male relative (Madichie and Gallant, 2012). These issues have been acknowledged, but not their impact. The main reason could be the traditional methodological approaches neglected these concerns. The concerns about the researcher's social position are given attention in the advanced qualitative methods such as narrative and reflexivity.

Also, Arab women's condition is by itself an interesting issue to study, where the public rhetoric led by governments seems to contradicts cultural practices (Al-Azri, 2013), and the law does not seem to play a major role in changing their lives (Al-Lamki, 1999; El Saadawi, 2007), nor education (Neal et al., 2005) or financial independency (El-Haddad, 2003); yet these Arab women are framed and analysed within their Western women counterparts' experiences (Al-Lamki, 1999; Saliba, 2000; Golley, 2004).

By laying out these issues, I suggest that the theoretical underpinning that I am applying in this study might give an alternative platform to study entrepreneurship among Omani women. The logic of social doing (West and Zimmerman, 1987, 2009) will shed light not only on the meanings these women hold and express, but also on the practices that these women do to carry entrepreneurship, gender, religion and perhaps other social doings that are not explored yet. As an insider that belongs to the same group and culture, but not sharing the experience of an entrepreneur; and as an outsider, as not experiencing entrepreneurship, and exposed to the western system and education, I believe with practising reflexivity, I am able to spot, notice and unpack – to a large extent – the nuanced knowledge within my sample and interpreting their experiences within the lines of culture and the logic of social doings.

Also, the logic of social doing allows me to explore the contextual influence that has shaped these doings. Therefore, I do not intend to delve into the field with pre-fixed categories but rather develop them from the field. Although the social doing is a perspective developed in the West, it allows flexibility and captures the idea of meanings and practices in constructing notions. With this in mind, I explore the notion through practices and the meanings individuals ascribe to the notion, and contextualise it in the Omani context. By doing so, I intend to offer a localised knowledge that is perspectival and contextual.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter I have presented how women's entrepreneurship notion is framed, positioned and studied in the literature. The review demonstrated how the notion is a fluid and changed over time, which reflected the historical period, the context, the culture, pattern of thinking and the ideology of research.

By addressing the main issues raised by contemporary and critical views in entrepreneurship, I have highlighted the problems with the mainstream literature of women's entrepreneurship. Against this background, I have highlighted the main concerns raised by critical entrepreneurship studies, in alignment with calls made by critical scholars in entrepreneurship to seek alternative perspectives to theorise the notions and to broaden our thinking when exploring new cultures and different contexts (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Steyaert, 2007; Calas et al., 2009; Essers et al., 2010; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Hereafter, I locate my theoretical underpinning and make suggestions for the possibility to tackle the field with this new alternative theoretical approach, which I believe will bring different insights and new knowledge that will contribute to the increasing debate on the contextual and perspectival knowledge in the women's entrepreneurship field. After developing an understanding on women's entrepreneurship in the Western context, and discussing the current debates in the critical entrepreneurship studies, I turned to review the limited studies available about Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship.

As demonstrated in this review, the studies on Arab women entrepreneurs were approached with Western traditional methods of research, and based on the experience of Western women entrepreneurs. I have demonstrated how the limited literature fell short of tackling the notion of and capturing the experience of Arab Muslim women in entrepreneurship. In order to prove the limitation of the current literature, I have highlighted some significant issues from the literature in management and leadership that enhance my argument of how the Western-led research into entrepreneurship is inadequate to capture the experience of Arab women's entrepreneurship, which warrants further investigation. I now turn to my methodological stance in the next chapter to introduce how I have conducted this study.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In alignment with the theoretical underpinning presented in chapter one, and guided by the gaps highlighted in the previous chapter, I turn to the methodological stance that has shaped how this thesis has been approached, conducted and produced.

4.2 Chapter outline

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part highlights the philosophical underpinning that shaped the theoretical and the methodological approach of my thesis. The second part introduces the research strategy that guided the process of conducting this study. The third part presents the research design, which includes data collection method, sampling and data analysis; it also includes how this study was conducted in practice. The fourth part highlights the data analysis mode and the rationale behind it. Finally, I close this chapter with a summary.

4.3 Part One: Methodological stance

4.3.1 Postpositivist traditions

I advocate for Prasad's (2005) conceptualising of qualitative research as a form of proficient craftwork. She claimed that qualitative research cannot be conducted on the basis of a clear-cut set of assumptions of theoretical paradigm, methodological procedures, models and methods of analytical framework. Qualitative research is messy, ambiguous and random in practice. It requires more flexible and creative approaches to enable the researcher to delve

into the study with more explorative theoretical background and flexible approaches to the empirical world, flexible approaches that allow the researcher to create their own style within the rigours of their methodological realm.

Prasad (2005) argued that the commonly used research paradigms lack the complexities for conceptualising knowledge and constraining qualitative research in practice. A research paradigm is referred to as a "shared set of ontological and epistemological assumptions that unites a community of scholars and prescribes specific guidelines for conducting research" (Prasad, 2005, p. 8). In this regard, she argued that these commonly used paradigms imply that the researcher needs to locate the study with one or another, and follow a set of certain producers and techniques. Thus, paradigms serve as a positivist approach to qualitative study, and qualitative study in practice requires more than a paradigm.

Prasad (2005) offered an alternative conceptualisation of the complexity of knowledge production by introducing a variety of postpositivist traditions that are theoretically grounded and methodologically rigorous. To elaborate: first, Prasad (2005) conceptualises the shared epistemological and ontological stances as traditions rather than paradigms. Research tradition is conceptualised as "complex ensemble of assumptions, worldviews, orientations, procedures and practices" (Prasad, 2005, p. 8). Traditions include paradigm and method combined. Traditions give the researcher a theoretically and methodologically overarching view to navigate through the messy practice of crafting a qualitative research (Prasad, 2005).

4.3.2 The traditions of 'post'

Intellectual traditions associated with the term 'post' mostly refer to the "intellectual positions intended to offer a radical critique of the entire fabric of modern Western thinking

from both within and outside it" (Prasad, 2005, p. 211). The three main 'post' traditions are postcolonialism, postmodernism and poststructuralism. They draw on problematizing the basic assumption of the Western knowledge system, but each take research practice differently (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). The three traditions – combined and separately – challenge the deep structure that has shaped Western rationality in knowledge systems (Agger, 1991; Prasad, 2005).

With this in mind, and in alignment with the critical entrepreneurship studies that advocate bringing different groups experience on the theorising level ~~conceptualising entrepreneurship as a process~~ (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006; Steyaert, 2007), critical authors demonstrate that conceptualising and exploring the realities of entrepreneurship are in need of 'pluralism paradigms'. Thus, I have chosen the postpositivist tradition that allows theoretical and methodological flexibility and does not constrain me to a paradigm. I do so in order to bring marginalised voices to the theorising level (Essers et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2013; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). I draw on the postpositivist tradition as the foundation for developing my methodological approach and selected method.

4.3.3 The postmodern thinking

As introduced in chapter one, the postmodernist tradition problematizes approaches to truth and reality, calling our attention to the situated nature of knowledge that is defined by the multiplicity of people's subjective positions (Agger, 1991), inviting the researcher to embrace knowledge in multiple, plural, local and contextual ways (Prasad, 2005; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

As an outsider from Western society who was exposed to the Western mode of thinking through pursuing higher education (MSc and PhD), I consider myself familiar – to a certain extent – with Western ways of thinking but am not fully institutionalised within it; which also made me an outsider to my context – to a certain extent. Inspired by postmodern thoughts, I was conscious of my research experience in two directional ways: inward and outward. My inward direction is twofold: first, to my own thinking system and my cultural narratives; second, to my participants as an insider, as we are the same group and share the same culture, however not the same experience. My outward direction is towards my study's Western academic audience where my and their cultural repertoire and reasoning system is different. In a way, I felt like an inbetweener, and shifting positions throughout (Shaw, 2010).

Gradually, I am becoming more aware of myself and how the knowledge I claim does not – in most cases if not all – resonate with the Western logic of thinking in mainstream research. Hence, it resonates with the contemporary critical movement in entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Steyaert, 2007; Essers et al., 2010).

I have developed – and am still developing – this self-awareness of my study through participating and presenting my work through different platforms, such as academic and non-academic conferences. In addition, living in a multicultural country like the UK, one is exposed to a different culture and way of thinking. This issue has made me rectify, modify and constantly rethink the logic that upholds the basis of my argument and the knowledge I claim.

Building on this personal experience, and aligning myself within the postmodern tradition and social constructionism has served as the background foundation that guided me initially

through reviewing my literature, and throughout in my methodological choices, methods, analysis and data presentation. It also gave me the flexibility to roam around the multiple traditions and methodological approach and integrate elements together in order to develop my thesis. As Prasad (2005) and (Kvale, 1996) put it, the craft of qualitative research is more like a journey, and the researcher is a traveller who explores without knowing where the journey will end, or who they will become at the end.

4.3.4 Epistemological stance

This study is premised on the social constructionist epistemology/perspective, where knowledge is treated as culturally made and socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 2001; Burr, 2003). This means that our knowledge and the meanings we hold about reality are constructed by the social world we inhabit and share with others, and by the culturally shared meanings that are available to us. Accordingly, how we make sense of our experience is shaped by the shared knowledge that we have accumulated through our up-bringing that is institutionalised, shaped and framed by our culture and social norms (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Kvale, 1996). In this line of thinking, meanings cannot go beyond the cultural meanings within a given society (Stead, 2004; Carter and Bolden, 2012). Our culture and our social reality play as frames of reference for our knowledge and the meanings we ascribe to things and our experience (Lincoln et al., 2011). Hence, we come to know what we know through actions, practices, relationships and interactions (Fletcher, 2007). Therefore, knowledge and action go together (Young and Collin, 2004). Meanings are constructed and appear in interpretations and negotiations (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Kvale, 1996).

One way of examining knowledge and meanings is by understanding the cultural practices and social interactions (Burr, 2003; Stead, 2004). Understanding the meanings of these

cultural practices and social relationships explains how and why individuals act in certain ways (West and Zimmerman, 1987), and also by understanding how individuals make sense of their experience. Therefore, an individual's subjective account of their experience and how they perceive reality are the main aspects of the social constructionist perspective. This personal and subjective account is considered as socially constructed view of their world and what could be perceived as important, also is considered as a window onto the social life and the cultural setting that one inhabits, and reveals the commonly shared meanings in one's context (Fletcher, 2007), which in turn reflects the local narrative that shape society's inspirations (Prasad, 2005).

In this regard, individuals are perceived as cultural products and social beings. Individuals think, act and behave according to socially shared meanings and cultural standards. Individuals interact and enact in accordance with the social system they live within. These social meanings and behaviours are learned and enacted, and they are sustained, produced and reproduced through cultural practices and social relationships (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Fletcher, 2007).

With this in mind, and going back to my research aim and questions, the aim is to explore the narratives of Omani women's entrepreneurs about the meanings and their understanding of practices within the perceived contextual influences that shape those practices. My interest is in how women socially construct the meanings and their practices within the perceived contextual influences that shapes those practices in their narrative. Their narratives which draw on a wider social and cultural practices, which also socially construct meanings about gender, context and entrepreneurship. Thus, the following section presents Narrative inquiry I adopted in this study.

4.3.5 Narrative Inquiry

4.3.5.1What is narrative research

The narrative mode of knowing situates any knowledge within its wider context in a story form. Past events constitute the current moment and lead to the future. In other words, events, meanings, actions and experiences are located within a sequence and order (Chase, 2005). The narrative mode of knowing brings in the historical period, cultural and social reality, political climate or any other elements of the wider contexts in order to locate that data and make sense of them (Czarniawska, 1998). Narrative organises the sequence of events, episodes, meanings and relationships and connects them as a meaningful whole (Czarniawska, 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Elliott, 2005; Webster and Mertova, 2007). Thus, narrative inquiry is a holistic mode of knowing that captures process (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and constructs data in a meaningful, whole story (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Thus, narrative captures the fluidity of notions; where meanings are not treated as a static form, but always in a process form (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Fletcher, 2007).

Narrative approach is an exploratory study that delves deeper into individuals' experience and tries to understand their reality and their experience from their point of view (Currie, 2010). It brings opinions, descriptions and feelings through the stories they tell about themselves (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). Hence, these stories are the window to the context (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). The context in this sense is also socially constructed, it evolves around the perceived important issues in the narratives shared (Elliott, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007). However, depending on the purpose/focus of the study, the context could be developed on different levels (Andrews et al., 2013). In my study, and through applying narrative, I have used context in two ways; first, the stories collected are windows to the

context, where I developed context as a background in chapter two. This chapter is based on my social constructionism which evolved during collecting and analysing data, and where the stories were the guide to the important issues. Secondly, I used context in terms of developing the perceived contextual influences that shape women's practices as understood by my participants, which is their social constructionism, which I present it in the results chapter. However, explained below.

The stories people chose to tell about themselves offer a descriptive account of their experience, and of their significance (Elliott, 2005). Individuals also bring their relationships to the surroundings, people, events and others of significance (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Hence, participants do not merely report or describe their life; they also reflect upon this experience and make sense of it with encouragement of the researcher (Elliott, 2005).

Thus, participants take an active role. Their active role is two-fold: first, researchers stimulate participants' interpretive capabilities by reflecting and making sense of their experience. Participants are empowered to speak and chose how they frame their story; including their role, action and relationships and how they represent themselves within their story. Therefore, participants do not merely report, they interpret and reflect on their experience (Elliott, 2005).

Second, participants to some extent determine the issues they talk about, and their significance in their lived experience (Polkinghorne, 2007). The significance of issues is chosen by the participants and further elaborated based on the researcher's encouragement. By doing so, the participants are empowered to engage actively in determining the most salient themes in the area of research (Elliott, 2005). This in turn makes narrative study data-driven,

and requires flexible methods that allow new perspectives and insights to emerge (Atkinson, 2012).

However, despite stories being told by the individuals and considered personal, they are also considered social and cultural (Fox, 2009; Andrews et al., 2013). In this regard, the stories individuals tell about themselves are the ones that are culturally available to them (Andrews et al., 2013). Their stories stem from the local narrtaive shared among a given society (Kvale, 1996). Narratives which draw on wider social and cultural practices in their setting (Prasad, 2005) which also socially consrtuct meanings about gender, context and entreprenurship.

Thus, they can also be seen as cultural artefacts (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Postmodernist scholars claim that our personal stories are shaped by the local narratives in our context (Prasad, 2005); our stories present how we speak culturally about certain issues, or not (Andrews et al., 2013).

The meanings we ascribe to objects, actions and our experience are driven by our context (Stead, 2004), from the things that we are exposed to (Steyaert, 2007) and are socialised with (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, individuals' stories embody social norms and cultural values that represent the collective shared understanding (Elliott, 2005; Fox, 2009; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Currie, 2010) which stems from locally shared narratives (Kvale, 1996).

Hence, in the social constructionist perspective, postmodern qualitative researchers and narrative inquirers share the idea of the important role of the researcher in construction and co-construction of knowledge with the respondent. The premise is that knowledge is not a ready-made product in people's mind, nor out there in the external world of the individual. Knowledge is generated based on the interaction between the researcher and the respondent

during the process of the study; and this is why reflexivity is important in this kind of study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Cortazzi and Jin, 2009).

Overall, narrative inquiry is considered a creative and flexible qualitative approach, which allows the researcher to craft their research within the complexity of social world and the messiness of the qualitative study (Kvale, 1996). In this regard, I have used narrative approach to explore first, the fluidity of notions that are socially constructed; second, to explore the socially constructed contextual influences that shape the local entrepreneurial practices as interpreted by women practising them.

This inquiry is not tied to a fixed structure, it mostly implies methods that offer in-depth and open-ended techniques where data can emerge from the field. Therefore, narrative study is mostly an inductive data-driven study (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). One can change, adapt or mix methods spontaneously based on research process and experience (Czarniawska, 1998).

4.3.5.2 Why Narrative?

First, narrative inquiry is an exploratory approach that provides a way to study a lived experience from the perspective of the individuals living it (Essers, 2009). Methodologically, it offers a wide variety of creative and flexible methods that equip the researcher to delve deeper into a lived experience through using and applying methods in different ways (Lieblich et al., 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Second, the narrative mode of knowing allows capturing the understandings of meanings and practices within their context. It offers descriptive yet subjective accounts by the participants of their experiences, actions and lives (Elliott, 2005). Based on the research questions, I

explore the understandings of meanings and the practices within their context; thus the narrative approach well suits bringing meanings to objects and actions exhibited by individuals (Chase, 2011), capturing the practices of entrepreneurship, gender and other social doings through the descriptive information offered through stories shared and the meaning they hold to the ones living it (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) within the perceived contextual influences that shape those practices as shared by the narratives told, narratives that draw on a wider social and cultural setting in a given society (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004).

Third, the significance of issues in a lived experience in a specific culture is determined, at least to some extent, by the participants as well as the researcher (Elliott, 2005). As the researcher is invited to engage the participants via enhancing their interpretation capabilities and reflecting on their experience and making sense of it (Elliott, 2005).

Fourth, as this study is located in a non-Western context, the question of cultural applicability and suitability needs to be considered (Polkinghorne, 2007). Thus, the narrative approach pays considerable attention to the locally shared narratives that shape society's aspiration (Prasad, 2005). Also, narrative approach takes the cultural ways of telling a story into consideration and treats these stories as cultural artefacts (Cortazzi and Jin, 2009).

Finally, narrative approach allows me to acknowledge my own cultural embeddedness, and engage actively in the construction of the knowledge (Borer and Fontana, 2012). The role of the researcher is acknowledged and considered as a source of knowledge production (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Thus, it also allows me to make sense of the meanings and issues raised during the interviews and the process of this study (Crotty, 1998).

Thus, reflexive knowledge is essential and not additional to narrative research (Cortazzi and Jin, 2009; Etherington, 2009; Andrews et al., 2013). Reflexivity is not merely considered a method to acknowledge the researcher's impact, it is also used as a criterion to judge the validation, trustworthiness and integrity of the study (Finlay, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007; Finlay, 2012). This is why I have introduced myself in the opening chapter. In the following part, I present more details of reflexivity during data collection and analysis.

4.4 Part Two: Strategy

Research strategy determines the actions that the researcher takes in order to achieve the research aim and questions. In this regard, the researcher makes the research process available for the reader to evaluate the study (Creswell, 2009). Strategy includes the process of the decisions taken at every point of carrying out a study (Finlay, 2012). Based on my methodological stance, I have applied reflexivity as the strategy in my study, which also serves as a method to assess the quality of the study (Chase, 2005). For the former I introduced myself at the beginning of this study, which allows the reader to evaluate and build on my standpoint and how that has shaped the study; while for the latter and by revealing the process, the validity, trustworthy and integrity of study is claimed (Finlay, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007; Finlay, 2012).

4.4.1 Reflexivity

I introduced the definition of reflexivity in chapter one, and introduced myself within the same chapter. To recap, I use reflexivity as a research strategy that acknowledges my standpoint and position; it also reveals the background of choices and decisions I have made throughout the research process.

In this part, I present two aspects of reflexivity: first, I introduce the theoretical lens that equipped me to interpret my data, and second, the stages of applying it during data collection and analysis.

4.4.1.1 Reflexive textual practices

Based on the constructionist perspective, Alvesson et al. (2008) suggest that reflexive practices are embodied in textual practices. Thus, they propose four sets of textual practices as forms for the reflexive researcher: multi-perspective, multi-voice, positioning practice and reflexivity, as destabilising practices. The first two practices are interested in new insights, ways of seeing, meanings, frames, re-conceptualisation and representation; while positioning and destabilising take a critical stance and examine the power relations in knowledge production.

Alvesson et al. (2008) invite the researcher to combine the practices or use them separately, depending on the study's aim and questions. Based on my research aim and questions, I seek to explore new perspectives and re-conceptualisation, and to bring subjective interpretation and new voices. I chose a combination of multi-perspective and multi-voicing practices. The multi-perspective enables emergence of new insights during and out of data collection and analysis, while multi-voicing aims to locate my voice in co-construction and in relation to the research topic and participants' voices.

4.4.1.2 Multi-perspective practices

Primarily, this is used to provide more than one perspective of a particular notion, by using multiple vocabularies, metaphors, theories, stories, interpretations, paradoxes and frames.

Multi-perspective uses the tension among different perspectives to expose different assumptions and open up new ways of thinking and seeing things (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Also, multi-perspective gives me space to exhibit my own co-construction based on my own position and experience. My knowledge is presented through frames and metaphors (the data presentation of this study). Root metaphors are one of the choices a researcher has in multi-perspective practice; they are used to bridge gaps of language, culture and social norms. Metaphors are either developed by the researcher's co-construction, or collectively negotiated in collaboration with participants (Alvesson et al., 2008). In this regard, I paid attention to the metaphors used by my participants during the interviews. I used these metaphors in the data presentation in the results.

4.4.1.3 Multi-voicing practices

Primarily, this refers to the voice of the researcher in relation to the voice of participants; where knowledge is constructed by each and co-constructed between both. Thus, the researcher is recognised as a subject of the research as much as the participants. Therefore, the researcher is creating 'the self' in the field. The researcher is the narrator of these voices.

In order for the researcher to speak about the experience of others, and interrogating the relationship between the two, the researcher in this stance needs to provide the following: first, the researcher is recognised as part of the research project, a subject that is constructed throughout the research process. Second, the researcher must declare their 'authorial personality' by presenting details of their particular experiences and interest, and disclose the steps they have taken in order to present their work. Third, the researcher opens up space

for the other in research accounts through self-conscious use of writing (Alvesson et al., 2008).

The multi-voicing perspective is adopted for two main reasons: first, to designate the researcher's voice within and differentiate it from participants' voices, in which I use extracts of the interviews and demonstrate how I interpreted these extracts in order to reveal how that knowledge came about. I also present my voice within the discussion to show where my voice resides within the voices of the women I am writing about. Also, I have introduced myself and my position at the beginning of this study; I give an overview of my participants in the results chapter (five); I also give a short introductory paragraphs of relevant aspects of my participants when their quote or extract is presented in the results chapter.

Second, to overcome the limitation of the multi-perspective, where a voice is allocated with a perspective, the multi-voice allows me to unpack whose voice, and which narrative. Meaning, it not only brings a voice to light, but brings out where this voice stands (Alvesson et al., 2008). Finally, it allows me to be self-cautious of my impact, which might have affected what stories they are telling me. In alignment with postmodern concerns with voice, plurality and representation (Prasad, 2005), this combined reflexive practice allows me to explore the field with caution and sensibility. The following sub-section offers the stages of applying reflexivity.

I have applied both practices while collecting data. In order to pay attention to both during the interviews and while analysing the data, and to examine my impact on my research, I have disclosed information about myself, and my relation to the topic and participants, which I initially wrote at the pre-field work stage, and then completed at the very end of my PhD.

4.4.1.4 Reflexivity stages

Most of the reflexive literature suggests applying reflexivity throughout the whole research process; while some limits it to data collection and analysis stages (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Generally, there are three stages (Finlay, 2002): pre-research, data collection and data analysis.

Pre-research stage

The researcher needs to examine and reveal their position, motives, assumptions and interests in the research topic. The researcher needs to be able to identify the forces that have influenced their research.

Data collection stage

Most of the emphasis in applying reflexivity is put in this stage, where the researcher needs to be sensible to the relationship formed between the researcher and the respondent. Reflexive analysis enables the researcher to identify how the data is collected via methods used and the emerging researcher–participant relationship. Reflexive analysis during data collection includes writing field notes before and after an interview; the reflexive analysis discloses the process and outcomes of data collection, and how the relationship evolves. The reflexive analysis at this stage includes both personal and methodological aspects. Issues such as ethics and power come to the fore in this stage, even if it is not within the scope of the study, where it is pivotal when including human subjects in the study.

Data analysis stage

This stage is during the analysis, where the researcher examines their fieldwork notes and integrates them within the analysis process. Rich insights can emerge when one examines one's own ambivalent responses.

For the current study and after illustrating the reflexive parameters, I explain how I practised reflexivity under the fieldwork section in the third part of this chapter.

4.4.1.5 Research parameters

Qualitative research skills are mostly learned by practice and by reading others' experience (Seale et al., 2004). Reflexivity is not an easy task to tackle, and there are different experiences in the literature in conducting reflexivity (Chase, 2005; Andrews et al., 2013). The variety of experiences could be perceived as opportunity for creativity. I took the risk of developing my own parameters for my reflexive notes, which I applied during the fieldwork.

To systemise this function, I therefore developed reflexivity parameters on research elements. Parameters are my thoughts, feelings, reasonings and points of reference. Research elements are self, topic and participants. These parameters on the element framework guided me to acknowledge my effects; it also enabled me to pause at each stage (pre, during, post) to engage reflexively with the elements (self, topic and participants).

By applying this framework, I was able to capture and examine my standpoint and how it might have shaped the interview and the relationship between researcher, subject researched and participant, and data analysis and interpretation (Finlay, 2002).

However, these reflexive note-based parameters were developed based on the pilot study and before conducting the fieldwork. Therefore, some notes were written retrospectively (8 participants); but research notes were applied in practice throughout the two stages of data collection.

At the pilot study stage, I used research notes, during and after the interview, which helped me to develop these parameters. These parameters may represent my understanding of how to apply reflexivity. However, reflexive notes are not used as an object for analysis, as this study is not a reflexive research but draws on/incorporates reflexivity; hence they are used as a tool to enhance the interpretation of data analysis, and for me to remain self-aware during the research process of data collection and interpretation.

4.5 Part Three: Design

Research design is the master plan that combines the methodologies, methods, sampling techniques, data collection and analysis methods (Zikmund et al., 2012; Creswell, 2013). This is an inductive exploratory qualitative study; the inductive study line is concerned with developing a new knowledge, or theory (Hussey and Hussey, 2003). It is least concerned with the testability of theory or the conclusions drawn (Peirce, 1935).

With this in mind, and integrating it with the messiness and randomness of qualitative studies in practice (Prasad, 2005), I have worked in an iterative process, where the research started to take firmer shape after the pilot study.

I seek to explore the understandings of meanings and practices of the entrepreneurship within the perceived contextual influences that shape those practices and concepts; and situate the co-constructed knowledge within the Omani context. The context is developed here based on the significance of issues that came out of the participants' stories (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). However, I have used context in two aspects to achieve this study's purpose: first, I developed context based on the important issues came out of the narratives told, and adding my own experience, knowledge and social constructionism as an insider

(Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). I interpret, analyse, relate and locate the data produced within the contextual frame that is presented in chapter two. Therefore, the context serves as a significant part of the interpretation process rather than as merely informative background (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2012). Second, I have developed the contextual influences that is constructed based on my participants interpretation of what is believed to be influencing their entrepreneurial doings, which is the second part of my results.

In order to achieve my aim, objectives and answer the research questions, I applied the life-story interview format (Lieblich et al., 1998; Atkinson, 2012). Interviews are used as the only data collecting method (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012); the rationale behind this step is explained in the following.

4.5.1 Interviews as a method

Studies that aim to explore in-depth insights and further unexplored issues devote a sufficient amount of time to interviewing and rely on it as the basis of the study (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). Having said that, I suggest that interviewing only served the purpose of the study; the reasons are given below.

First, current studies that applied entrepreneurship from a social doing perspective have mostly applied ethnography methods, which include observation mixed with interviews (e.g. Bruni et al., 2004). West and Zimmerman (2009) suggest that any method that allows descriptive account of a practice can be used in the 'doing' perspective. Being an insider, my observation is based on my own cultural background, which I bring into the co-construction and data analysis. However, I did not want to rely merely on my observation of describing practices and interpreting them. Also, and in order to answer the study's questions, I was

seeking women entrepreneurs' subjective interpretation of their own experience and how they make sense of it in their context.

I intend to capture the doings through the description offered in the narrative accounts shared by the participants; however, and building on the premises that doings are contextual, my interest is to present the doings within the contextual influences that shape them, from women's perspective and interpretation. Thus, interviews allow discussion, reflection and interpretation to take place between the participants and the researcher (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this regard, what are the doings and how were they shaped are developed based on participants interpretation with my co-construction.

The descriptive accounts offered in the interview served the purpose of describing practices (Chase, 2005; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). According to West and Zimmerman (1987) any method offers descriptive accounts can be applied on the idea of doing. Therefore, the life-stories offered descriptive accounts of doings based on how my participants saw them, rather than what I saw and how I saw it; my inputs were in the discussion during the interviews to trigger further details of their doings. Practically, the interviews and observations both combined or separately are time-consuming (Atkinson, 2012); therefore, I have chosen an approach that serves the purpose within the timeframe available, as I am constructing the notion based on two aspects: meanings and practices, and draw the context to situate the constructed knowledge. I claim by interviewing that I can achieve these three elements simultaneously.

Second, life-story interviews are an informative tool, where they provide a set of opinions, perspectives, descriptions, events, places and people (Silverman, 2011). The respondents are encouraged to organise these events, signify the important issues and interpret their own life experience (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this regard, and based on a lived experience, I picked on key issues emerging during the interview and discussed them further with the respondent (Atkinson, 2012). After being exposed to entrepreneurship and gender studies, one starts to become aware and critical of the gendered nature of language, practices and organisation. Thus, I kept asking myself and my participants whether any particular practice is only related to 'women', or is it 'entrepreneurial', and why is it so. The 'why do you think' offered the roots of the perspective and the point of reference, which is a crucial point in my study.

Also, I realised by allocating sufficient time to the interviews, I can delve deeper into the stories. Given that the way people deal with time is cultural, and Arab culture is quite loose with time, the time consumed before and after each interview was double the time of the interview itself. Most of the interviews included meals and sitting with families, especially the ones conducted at home. The overall time in some interviews took between five and six hours without logistics.

I had to be flexible and enable my participants to feel comfortable and at ease to speak more about themselves and their experience. At the same time, my cultural awareness of the hospitality of Omani culture (especially in the interior areas) and the importance of relationship, I accepted all invitations from my participants, out of social courtesy.

Third, within the practice perspective of conceptualising entrepreneurship, and due to the segregated nature of Omani society, I realised in the pilot study that there are certain entrepreneurial practices that require the involvement of a male relative figure. This creates a cultural challenge for me on the professional and personal levels. First, in a sex-segregated society, as a woman, I cannot get involved with a male figure or with a woman while the male figure is around. Second, in the long term this might jeopardise my professional (and social) reputation in a society where we interact with men out of necessity (Madichie and Gallant, 2012), and research is not yet perceived as a necessity reason (Omair, 2008).

However, this is an opportunity in itself; as an insider and woman, I have access to women-only private spaces, which is considered a challenge for researchers with Arab women in the Gulf countries (Omair, 2008; Madichie and Gallant, 2012). The opportunity lies in the access and sharing personal stories within their own language at their own pace. I devoted all my attention to these personal stories and local narratives. Studies about Arab women demonstrated that although Arab societies are vocal, they are sensitive to women's issues and sharing personal information (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), especially to a Western researcher (Halldórsdóttir, 2014). So, my position is an advantage.

The experience of the pilot study helped me to better prepare for the fieldwork and directed the research process. The summary of the pilot study is offered after the interview format section.

4.5.1.1 The Life-story interview

> *"we think in a story form, speak in a story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story form"* (Atkinson, 2012, p. 115)

The life-story interview is one of the most commonly used interview formats in narrative inquiry to study a lived experience, whether to explore personal or shared experience (Lieblich et al., 1998; Atkinson, 2012). It is an exploratory and in-depth method that seeks to achieve deep insights and information of a lived experience (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). It offers opinions, and rich, informative and descriptive data (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Essers, 2009). It also offers insights that are significant but might have been neglected previously (Polkinghorne, 2007), and most importantly, it stimulates the interpretation capabilities of the participants on their own experience (Elliott, 2005).

The life-story approach falls within holistic and practical methodological approaches that collect personal narratives in order to reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in a given context (Atkinson, 2012).

The most important aspect of life-story narrative is bringing the participant's voice within a life story as whole. It pays considerable attention to the subjective interpretation of the stories by the individuals living it; it is considered more than any other approach that delves deeper into one's personal story to explore the wider context (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). The context that shape those stories (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Hence, this approach enables the participants to determine the significant issues in their context, the way they see it and interpret it (Polkinghorne, 2007).

The life-story interview gives the respondent the platform to tell their story in the way they want to tell it, and determine what is to be told. Respondents pick the episodes, incidents and people of importance to their experience. With the encouragement of the researcher, the respondent connects, links and organises their life in a story form; also, the interpretation capabilities of the respondent are stimulated by the researcher to make sense of their life, and what meanings they hold (Elliott, 2005).

However, although life-story interview sounds like a personal story, the stories we tell about ourselves echo the stories culturally available to us (Andrews et al., 2013). Accordingly, the stories that are told reflect the culture and the dominating narratives in public discourse. Thus, life-stories are a window onto shared knowledge, cultural setting and social reality.

The life-story interview might go back to the birth period, and might bring insights that were not expected; thus, the researcher needs to be open, flexible and adaptable to changes or new directions that might occur during the course of the interview. This format is little or non-structured, and the researcher must be tolerant to ambiguity and uncertainty (Lieblich et al., 1998; Atkinson, 2012).

However, the life-story interview gives the interviewer–respondent relationship considerable attention, due to its intimate nature (Atkinson, 2012); where issues of ethics, trust, rapport and authority are emphasised (Borer and Fontana, 2012). To follow the criteria, I have completed the ethical form as per University of Bedfordshire criteria, in Appendix 1. Also, I paid considerable attention to ethical concerns during the interview process and writing up of this thesis, through applying reflexivity.

Against the above background, I suggest life-story interview is the most suitable for my study; first, it brings a voice of a group of people that has been neglected in the existing literature. This voice is constructed based on their subjective interpretation of their own experience. Second, it allows descriptions, accounts, opinions, and access to the cultural local narrative, and the context. Context that shape those stories through the local narratives that shared among a given society. Third, it is less-structured and allows flexibility for new possibilities and insights to emerge. This flexibility equips the researcher to change, adapt and modify. Fourth, it enables the respondent to take an active role in determining the significance of issues and in reflecting and interpreting their experience. Finally, it acknowledges the role of the researcher in the interview process, which allows me to address myself and my influences.

The kind of data that I am imagining to develop out of applying life-story narratives are socially construction of the followings: first, informative, of the meanings, the practices, and the context (developed for chapter two). Second, descriptive, of the 'whats' and 'hows' of the practices. Finally, interpretive, of the 'whys' of the practices within the context, and 'what' do these contextual influences mean to them and 'how' it shaped their practices.

After laying out the data collection method and format, I turn to the application phase of this study. I present below the sampling techniques which include recruiting process; then I present the pilot study and the fieldwork; before delving into the analysis mode and process.

4.5.2 Sampling

Narrative study is not concerned with generalisability (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Silverman, 2010; Beitin, 2012). The significance is not based on statistical representation but rather by the usefulness and the richness of the data and experience (Kvale, 1996; Atkinson,

2012; Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). Also, postmodern studies replace the idea of generalisation with the idea of contextualisation of the knowledge produced (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Thus, I have applied purposeful sampling techniques. I recruited a small number of participants who fit the criterion and were presumed to have the experience that this study seeks to explore (Patton, 2002). The criterion is to include only women who are registered as entrepreneurs with PASMED.

4.5.2.1 Recruitment process

Information about the sampling process is important in interview-based research, as the knowledge produced depends on the sample (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). The recruitment process started during my pilot study, where I participated in PASMED workshops and events. I approached most of the participants during this stage (20). Others were nominated from PASMED (7), and the rest were selected from the sheets offered by PASMED (2) and based on their availability. I have established contacts during the pilot study, conducted 8 during this stage, and the rest during fieldwork.

4.5.3 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted between 24th December, 2014, and 4th February, 2015. I participated in the workshops that were organised by PASMED, which took place on 24th and 25th December, 2014 and on 25th to 28th January, 2015 (@oman_sme, 2015).

The decision for my participation was based on my previous experience; women from interior areas are expected to attend these events, as Oman is very capital-centric country (Al-Azri,

2013). I was trying to gather a heterogeneous group that included different women from all Omani regions (Mason, 2002).

My other reason to take part in these activities was to get access to official reports and information, as data and research are very scarce in the Gulf countries (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Also, the culture of research is not much valued in the Omani context, therefore accessibility relies on relationships (Al-Azri, 2013).

I interviewed eight women during the pilot study; four of which I met at the events, the rest were nominated by PASMED. Interviews were based on their availability; as some were not available but were interested, I included them in the fieldwork.

I had an initial interview map, which I changed through the process of the interviews. Through these interviews, I developed my interview map and improved my interviewing and listening skills, through listening to myself during transcribing (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012), as the quality of qualitative research improves with practice (Seale et al., 2004). I also experimented with how the research method is sufficient and suitable culturally (Watson, 2009), such as the example I mentioned of observation method and gender in the Omani context. I also realised the sensitivity of clothing. As mentioned in the reflexivity section in chapter one, I do wear my headscarf (Hijab) in the cultural style but I do not wear the black Abaya, which is the norm in the Gulf countries (Omair, 2009). In order to be perceived as more local and less modernised, I started wearing the black Abaya.

Through the preliminary data analysed from the pilot study, some of the main themes were developed; these then directed the study during the subsequent fieldwork. Overall, the

fieldwork was based on the pilot study experience. With this in mind, I turn to my fieldwork next.

4.5.4 Fieldwork

The fieldwork took place over the course of five months. The initial plan was for a period of three months, from 1st December, 2015 to 29th February, 2016. However, I extended this period till 29th April, 2016. The reasons are mainly the time consumed by interviews; because Omanis do not plan ahead for very long; due to attending other events out of social courtesy, in order to build trust with my participants and the authority, PASMED; and finally, the time consumed by the logistics, especially for women in the interior.

I now present the reflexive report and the interview process of my study.

4.5.5 Practising reflexivity

Reflexivity is learned by experience; hence, writing reflexively does not become any easier, even with experience. At this stage, and after the data analysis, I started making decisions about excluding and including data based on relevancy to the overall knowledge that is produced in this study.

4.6 Pre-fieldwork stage

In Oman, the possibility I might know the participants before conducting the interview was high. The population of Oman is around two million. Oman is a high-context society where relationships are formed based on trust and family history connections; thus, maintaining long-term relationships is important. Also, and as mentioned, Omani society is sex-segregated (Al-Azri, 2013). Women gather in women-only social spaces and occasions. Social obligations on women are usually high and important. So, we women meet each other in social

gatherings. Personal relationships became blended in the professional space. I assume that my relationship with participants will continue even after the research is over.

Also, the number of women in the public space is limited, although increasing gradually. Thus, we as women either know each other or of each other. In addition to my background in media, the probability that my participants know of me is high, and that I know them –through social gatherings – or of them is high, too.

4.6.1 Interview process

Following the life-story interview stages as highlighted by Atkinson (2012), the interview process has three stages: 1) planning (pre-interview); 2) doing the interview, which includes guiding the respondent through telling and recording it; and finally, 3) transcribing the interview, leaving questions and comments by the interviewer. I add the place of the interview as part of this stage model due to the sensitivity of shared/public and private spaces for women in Oman.

4.6.1.1 Stage one: Pre-interview

The interview map was developed based on the pilot study (Appendix 2). I had a folder prepared for each participant, which included consent form (Appendix 3), basic information sheet (Appendix 4), and a blank sheet to draw a life-stage model for reflection and interpretation. I also had a folder of my own which included interview map, topic list (just in case) that was adapted from a study on Arab women entrepreneurs (Jamali, 2009) (Appendix 5) and my research notebook, which included my reflexive parameters, and my mobile phone as a recording device.

I started contacting the women whom I had already met during the events in the pilot study by text messages or WhatsApp, as emails are not used by all (the authority contact sheet offered mainly a mobile number). Upon their response, I made a phone call to arrange for the appointment, location and timing. The appointments kept changing, and in some cases I was given an appointment on the spot. In Oman, people are more spontaneous and it is very rare to find Omanis working with fixed schedules, especially in the interior. I adjusted my timing according to them. Once the appointment, time and location were set, I took the folders and my phone and put my black Abaya on and went. I used to arrive before the time set in order to write down my reflexive notes; if the location was their house, I wrote my reflexive notes before leaving my place.

4.6.1.2 Stage two: During the interview

All the interviews lasted around two hours; they were audio-taped and mainly in Arabic. There were three locations where the interview took place: 1) public high-end coffee shops or restaurants; 2) participants' offices; and 3) participants' houses.

Women from conservative tribes and interior regions invited me to their house and mostly, this was accompanied with serving me dinner/lunch meal (4). Some women who were originally from the interior but live in Muscat invited me for an early morning breakfast (8 am) (5); only one from this group invited me to her office. Women from non-Arab ethnic groups/tribes were divided to two groups: the first group chose high-end coffee shops or hotel lounges, while the second invited me to their offices, mostly early mornings.

The meaning of the location in my interpretation represents women's conservativism level, which is related to their tribe. The public spaces and the time women are allowed culturally to be seen depends on their tribal roots.

Based on the same categorisation, women from interior were in their Abaya, although the fashion now is for coloured Abaya; but it is still an Abaya. The rest, especially from non-Arab ethnic groups, mostly came in their casual outfit. Most of the un-veiled women came without headscarf (4), some wore the headscarf in the cultural way but not religious (8). The rest were veiled for religious purposes. I was in my Abaya in all the interviews, despite location or the participant's appearance.

The meeting started with catch-up chats with women I already knew; while the chats took the form of introducing each other for the women I met for the first time, all of whom knew of me through TV.

Once we sat and ordered beverages, I set the scene by introducing myself as a researcher, and introduced my study. I wanted to position myself as an academic researcher rather than a media or TV personality.

I then handed them the consent form in two languages. I choose the language of the interview based on the language of the consent form they picked; as some come from non-Arab ethic groups, I assumed their preferred language might be English.

Very few read the consent form, mostly asking me where to sign. I asked them if they wanted to read it; the answer came: *"ohhh… we trust you".* Culturally, we sign based on relationships and trust. The signature on the consent forms in my interpretation is an indicator for a long-lasting relationship, which will go beyond the research project.

However, even if the language started in English in the interview, it switched to Arabic and became mixed. As the aim was to make the respondent at ease, the choice of the language was less of a concern for me. Most of the interviewees were conducted in Arabic and in different Omani dialects; these I am familiar with due to my previous experience, as mentioned in chapter one.

The interview started with *'tell me your story'*. Then, I picked topics through the issues emerging. As mentioned, the main themes were developed in the pilot study stage; this made the interview a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 2). However, I was alert and open to new insights (Atkinson, 2012).

I also applied the life-stage model as suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998) in the holistic mode of analysis. However, I used this stage-model graph as a reflection/interpretation tool rather than an interview format. I finally asked them to describe their life-stage in a metaphor of their choice and explain it to me in order to stimulate their reflection/interpretation capabilities; and to close their life-story.

I closed the interview with an abstract question around Islam. The reason was that Islam did not come up naturally or explicitly during the course of the interview in the pilot study. So, I ended the interview with an abstract question on their opinion about Islam.

4.6.1.3 Stage three: After the interview

Once the interview was over, and the recorder was turned off, one of the participants continued about her entrepreneurship; but the rest stopped and we started the meal which was served after the interview. General topics started to come, mainly my marital status. I had to share some personal information: about career around my marital status; and issues

about juggling between motherhood, career and social obligations. Also, in some cases, the talks finished once the interview was over. These after-interview talks made me think of the concerns that occupy these women's minds, or maybe my presence triggered it.

The first thing I did after leaving was writing the reflexive notes, either at the interview place or in the car. However, I started analysing once the interviews were transcribed.

4.7 Data Analysis

The decision to choose an analysis method was guided by four aspects: first, to explore the subjective interpretation of a shared experience including understanding of meanings and practices; second, to capture the description of cultural and social practices by individuals practising them; third, to develop a perceived contextual influences that shape these practices, and finally, to construct a context that serves a background to suite this study within. The interpretation of the data and the knowledge produced is constructed in an iterative approach between data analysis, reflexive notes, interpretation and developing categories and context based on significance and relevancy of and to the data which emerged in the interview. Also, as the Omani market is very small, I have chosen to present the data thematically, for confidentiality reasons mainly. Also, I wanted to address the shared issues in their experience within the Omani context.

With this in mind, I have decided to apply categorical-content life-story analysis, as suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998). This analytical mode is recommended in exploring a shared experience among individuals living the experience. This mode pays attention to the individual's perception, and the context that shaped the common issues in the experience, from individuals' own interpretation. Lieblich et al. (1998) offered a variety of analytical

modes, which depend on the purpose of the study. A combination of their approach has been adopted by Essers (2009), in which she builds on the same theoretical underpinning applied in this study: entrepreneurship and gender as doing. She studied immigrant Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands.

4.7.1 Analytical mode

Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest that there are two main independent dimensions in reading and analysing life-stories: first, holistic versus categorical approaches; second, content versus form. Although clear differentiation can be made between the two dimensions, the possibility of reading the text using central points is preferable to overcome the limitations of each.

The first dimension refers to the unit of analysis; the holistic approach treats the story as a whole, where the individual's experience is analysed retrospectively, the past incidents and events are taken into account to understand how the current position has developed; while the categorical approach focuses on the individuals' shared experience, where attention is paid either to the utterance or certain sections abstracted from the text of the story. Thus, the aim in this approach is to explore meanings in a shared experience of a phenomenon or a problem among a group of people. The former leans towards more psychological studies that are individual-centred research, while the latter is considered as a sociological perspective.

The second dimension refers to the traditional dichotomy in literary reading of texts, depending on the purpose of the research, which can focus either on the content of the text, or the form of how the story is told, the structure. The content reading of the text is similar to the traditional content analysis in research methods, where sections or words are

abstracted from the story or several stories and designated to define categories based on frequency. Thus, the researcher quantifies abstracted text and words in order to signify their importance. Some readings focus on the explicit meanings of the content, and others might seek implicit meanings by asking further questions about the subjective interpretation and the meanings from the perspective of the teller.

The form reading of the text is interested in the structure of the story rather than the content; it focuses on elements such as the development of the plot, sequence of events, time axis, the feelings evoked, metaphors used and voices presented in the story; the structure of the story is the object of analysis. The content approach of reading is more obvious and immediate – the frequency of shared topics signifies their importance; whereas the form reading mode is more in depth and digs deeper into layers of the individual's inner world.

Lieblich et al. (1998) perceive that these dimensions intersect, which resulted in a matrix of four modes of reading and analysing life stories in narrative research (Table 2).

Table 2: Narrative analytical mode matrix

Holistic-Content	Holistic-Form
Categorical-Content	Categorical-Form

Holistic-content analysis is usually used in 'case studies', where the reading takes the life story as a whole and analyses the content presented by it. Holistic-form is interested in identity construction of an individual research; it focuses on the structure of the story.

Categorical-content analysis is suggested when the research aims to explore a shared experience among a group of people. This mode of analysis extracts sections and words from

the various stories and classifies them into groups and categories, where these categories are developed through either reading the text thematically, or pre-defined categories are based on experiment or theory. Thus, the text is treated quantitatively as well, which pays attention to the frequency of the words, or sections of shared topics among all stories.

The categorical-form of analysis is applied when the research seeks to explore transition of stages in certain groups. Thus, this mode of analysis pays attention to the style of the story and the linguistic characteristics of the language used.

I have adopted the categorical-content approach in reading and analysing the text produced in the narrative interviews. The rationale behind this choice is that this mode of analysis is recommended when the aim of the research is to explore meanings of a shared experience, phenomenon or a problem among a group of people. As claimed by Lieblich et al. (1998), the intersectional analysis between the two dimensions – categorical and content – leads to a better specification and conceptualisation of the notion under study via illustrating a lived experience of Omani women entrepreneurs (Essers, 2009).

4.7.2 Analysis process

As prescribed by Lieblich et al. (1998), there are four steps in this mode of analysis. The following presents each step, followed by an explanation of how it was applied in the analysing of this research data.

1. Selection of the sub-text

This step is similar to thematic analysis, in which reading the transcription is done with an open mind and without predefined categories, and starting developing categories is based on patterns and the themes emerging from the data. Then, and based on the hypothesis,

propositions or developing categories, the text is divided into sections according to these concerns; these sections are extracted from the context of the story and are submitted to qualitative or quantitative treatment for analysing the text. The extracted sections are treated independently from the whole story of the individual. The rest of the text could be ignored if not relevant to the categories.

I read the transcription of the interviews more than once, in order to find similar themes, shared events and incidents. This process started during the interviews; some issues started to appear during the first couple of interviews, where I noted them down and included them in the interview map for the next interview. In this interview format, no interview is the same, although the guidelines are (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012), as the researcher brings their standpoint, culture, experience and knowledge to the study. I was expecting certain things to appear naturally but they did not, such as the implicit impact of Islam on Muslim women's entrepreneurship as emphasised in the literature. In this scenario, I developed the abstract closing question.

The stage of developing themes requires immersing oneself in the data, which is mostly done in more than one round of reading the data, and in which the analysis takes an iterative process between analysing and interpreting; I started to notice how some issues are rather hidden and come in different forms, which in turn made me redevelop the categories throughout the process of analysing.

2. Definition of the Content Categories

The categories include themes or perspectives that are drawn from the total context of the stories. The text in these categories could include words, sentences or even paragraphs. These categories can be predefined based on theory or literature.

In the second step, the researcher defines major categories and develops them from the data. The process of analysing takes a different turn. In this step of reading, the procedure takes careful reading, suggesting categories, sorting the sub-text into categories, generating ideas for additional categories or to refine the existing ones. These categories are called empirical categories, as they are developed based on the text. However, these categories bring the reader's/researcher's own theoretical, common assumptions and social constructionism.

This stage, as the previous ones, started at the pilot study phase, in which they guided the interview in the fieldwork. For example, I knew that Islam would not appear naturally during the course of the interview based on the pilot study, so I had the closing question about Islam, but I was open to changes; surprisingly Islam did appear in certain interviews during fieldwork, which made me start analysing why, how and by whom.

After the interviews were over, developing these categories and defining them was mainly driven by the data, rather than the literature. These themes were developed iteratively between reading the transcriptions, interpretation, and listening to the recordings again in some cases, and going back to my reflexive notes.

3. Sorting the material into categories

This stage is allocated to sort the sections, sentences or paragraphs abstracted from the text into relevant categories. Categories may include quotes from several stories, and can be limited to one life story: meaning, it is sorting content into categories. Thus, the calculation treatment can take place after this sorting-out process is completed.

As the categories were developed, the main quotes were organised. The quotes were translated at this stage. Thus the analysis was carried out mainly in Arabic, and the chosen

quotes only were translated. In this scenario, a special attention is given to the translation. The translation is meaning-based, as the spoken Arabic in the interviews are in Omani dialects. I also invited two of my Omani fellows (female and male) who hold Master's degrees and come from interior Omani regions to check my meaning-based translations to ensure their accuracy and consistency. Also, these translated quotes were proofread in English by Dr Peter Norrington, otherwise unconnected with the research, to ensure that they are appropriate in English.

The second step I took here is trying to relate my categories to develop the two levels of context: in the first, I constructed the context (chapter two) based on the key elements from the stories (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004) and what I made out of it in relation to the study, which is my social constructionim. In the second aspect, I developed the perceived contextual influences (second part of my results) based on my participants' opinion and interpretation (Polkinghorne, 2007) of the 'how's of the practices and the 'whats' and 'whys' of the key contextual influences that shaped them. I used probe questions to elaborate further and stimulate interpretation, for example, about where these practices come from (Islamic, culture, law or other).

At this stage, the categories where developed while the threads of the context became more clear as key pillars.

4. Drawing conclusion from the results

Based on the research aim, the quantitative analysis of the text takes place. The content of the categories might be counted based on frequency of a word or expression; or the researcher might use the content collected in each category to write descriptively to draw a picture of the experience shared by a certain group of people or even cultures.

At this stage, I started to connect the categories, re-organise the sub-categories/themes and to construct the context and the contextual influences, simultaneously. I was carrying all these activities with main two main elements guiding me: meanings of the notion, and the description of practices within the interpreted contextual influences.

To summarise the analysis steps: initially, the categories were developed during the pilot study. Categories and sub-categories/themes were developed based on patterns that emerged from the data during that phase. These categories were the starting point for the fieldwork analysis.

After the fieldwork, I carefully read the interview transcriptions more than once, in order to find similarities and differences, then I started to extract quotes and paragraphs that can be included in these main categories, while keeping a peripheral view and open mind for new emerging insights on any potential categories or sub-categories that might emerge from the text.

After writing down the categories and sub-categories, the definition of the categories was constructed based on the data collected from the interviews and my cultural knowledge.

Then, deep thought was given to the categories in order to outline which were to be considered as categories and why, and which were to be included as sub-categories and why. The reason for this process is to evaluate what impacted, influenced or shaped what. Additionally, the extent of impact, influence or shaping were taken into consideration during this process. The extend was considered based on the frequency in the data, meaning, it was shared among most of the participants. The links between the categories and sub-categories were established by reviewing the intertwining relations between them.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have laid out the methodological stance of this thesis. Building on the thesis aim and developing on the theoretical underpinning, I have revealed the choices and the steps taken in tackling the fieldwork and the analysis process throughout this thesis to achieve the overall aim and objectives and answer the research questions.

Based on this methodological stance, the following chapter, 'Results', presents the overarching categories and themes included, with preliminary commentary.

Chapter Five: Results

5.1 Introduction

Going back to my research questions, the first question seeks to explore the meanings women entrepreneurs ascribe to the notion, while the second question seeks to explore how women understand their practices within the contextual influences that shape them in their narratives. Accordingly, the results are divided into two main parts, the first one is concerned with the conceptualisation of the notion, which is answering the first question; while the second is concerned with their practices within the perceived contextual influences that shape them, which is answering the second question.

Before delving into the data, I would like to draw the attention to the way I have chosen to present the data in the second part based on the analytical approach adopted in this study. As shown below, I have analysed and presented the data in the order of the perceived contextual influences that shape the doings. The rationale behind this step is twofold, first, the salient role of the contextual influences in shaping the practices, and that the latter is only understood within them, especially when studying a new group or context (Steyaert, 1997, 2007). Second, given that the two elements are inspirable, hence, practices can be described, interpreted and explained in light of the perceived contextual influences that shape them. By doing so, I assume and claim that my results are connected and make sense as a whole.

The way I have decided to present my data differs from the usual format for scholars applying this practice- based approach, however, I argue that the group, the culture and the context

that I am studying are foreign to the audience and Western academic. Therefore, and equipped with the flexibility and creativity that narrative approach provides, I presented that data in the order mentioned. Thus, I claim that I offer a consistent perspective of my data by doing so.

Although my analysis drew on narrative theory, as discussed in the previous chapter, here I present my results thematically, in order to preserve the anonymity of my participants.

However, I start by presenting a profile of my participants before presenting the results.

5.2 Participant Demographics

The sample comprised of twenty-nine women. Twenty-three once had respected jobs in the government, quasi-government, international organisations, or private sector; while six had never worked before, being newly graduated or housewives. Seventeen of the women started their businesses before 2013 as a side line but quit their jobs after the government began offering support for small businesses, while twelve started after 2013 as a result of the support offered.

The participants' educational background varied, with twelve holding Bachelor's degrees, from local universities and colleges, six holding Master's degrees from Western universities, eight having diplomas from local colleges, and the rest holding high-school certificates, with one leaving school at an early stage. Four women had their business in what is seen as professional activity, but due to confidentiality and the small market of Oman, I am not able to offer further details.

Ages ranged between twenty-two and fifty-five years, while twenty were married with children, two were divorced with children, and seven had never married. All women had

domestic labour help and lived with their families; most lived with their nuclear family; five lived with their in-laws. Eighteen of the participants were from the capital, eight were originally from rural villages but had moved to the capital, and three were from rural areas and remained there. The sampling group is heterogonous, including women from different sects, different Omani Arab tribes and non-Arab Omani ethnic groups/tribes in Muscat.

5.3 Part One: Conceptualising entrepreneurship

In this section I explore what entrepreneurship means to my participants, and what they understand about it, and explore their views on how entrepreneurship is evolving, developing and perceived in Oman. In order to do this I have concentrated on the meanings and their interpretation of the notion. The key points I developed from the data are: 1) My participants' motives; 2) Aspects associated with entrepreneurship; 3) What entrepreneurship is about; 4) How entrepreneurship is perceived; 5) The influence of antecedents of entrepreneurship; 6) The linguistic aspect of entrepreneurship; and 7) The gendering of entrepreneurship. I begin by exploring motive.

5.3.1 Becoming an entrepreneur

In exploring what entrepreneurship means to those women in this context, I began to explore their motives.

> *"… I made one product, sold it, made another one out of that money… and so on… and this is how the project started… I started this project while I had a job, I never had any plans to start a business or trade… I never had the intention… maybe I didn't realise that there would be a second step… the idea wasn't to turn my products into business or trading, I just wanted people in the world and Oman to see my Omani stuff... it was a hobby that I wanted people to see"* **[NH]**

"I was very excited the first year when I started to work, but then I was less enthusiastic the second year; the third year… I lost interest… I felt I am wasting my time with work… I am not going anywhere with my job… I felt I was taking someone else's chance that might want this job more than I do… so, let's take the risk, I started a side business [hobby and low scale]... *I resigned to stay home with my daughter… and think what to do later… then I started slowly to enjoy what I am doing* [her side business]*"* **[AR]**

"it was a hobby for me…" **[RH]**

"at the beginning it was just a hobby and fun... but I noticed that it can make money, good money… besides, I had a lot of free time…" **[NS]**

The demographics of the sample and the above quotes indicate that these women were not job-seekers. Most women had previous jobs, some were retired and some were housewives. Most of the participants were motivated by having an interest, or turning a hobby into entrepreneurship. Most started as a side business, and then became full-time entrepreneurs after 2013. They also reported having free time (especially the retired women and housewives), or as framed by their words *"nothing else to do"*; this encouraged them to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Interestingly, none of these women associated entrepreneurship with monetary outcome. For example:

"... my definition is that entrepreneurship is not business… it is not managing your accounts or financials… you can hire someone to do that for you... it is not about how much cash you have in your bank account, or break-even or profit you are making…" **[SW]**

"My definition is… a person who has the characteristics of an entrepreneur; it doesn't have to be a business" **[HL]**

These women came from different walks of life; some were highly educated, only one had left school early, and a minority held just high-school degree. They also did not share socio-

economic backgrounds, being neither from the same tribes nor sects nor ethnic groups. In addition, they come from different areas in Oman. Nonetheless, they shared the same hobby-related motive and none associated entrepreneurship with financial reward, on the contrary. The second-ranked motive was driven by new ideas and opportunities (3). For example:

> *"… I suppose any idea is new here..."* **[NM]**
>
> *"... because I knew we didn't have it in Oman, and I thought it would be something lovely to have it*" **[BS]**

These women have experienced a level of exposure whether through travelling or studying abroad, which opened their eyes and views for new ideas. These women believed that Oman is full of opportunities. Their exposure is the main source of their ideas, which enabled them to seize opportunities in the Omani market.

Also, family reasons ranked as the second motive (3); however, to maintain confidentiality, these personal reasons are not mentioned in the details given below, and though they had to leave their jobs to start the business, each had different family circumstances. These women shared a high level of education, mostly Western, and turned their profession into business. They also shared having small children; and they also came from the same ethnic groups/tribes. Two of these women did associate entrepreneurship with monetary reward.

In total, three women associated entrepreneurship with monetary outcomes and turned their profession into entrepreneurship, two from the capital and one divorced woman who came from the interior. The following quote is from this divorced woman:

> *"... in entrepreneurship, we should bridge the gaps in the society, and gain some financial rewards too… and entrepreneurship is the only way to do that"* **[BH]**

The third motive was to create change in society (3). For example:

> *"I was driven by something… called creating a change… I was fascinated by this term… "* **[MAW]**

In this category, three women expressed that their initial aim was to establish non-governmental organisations (NGO), but the long and complicated procedures of the government relating to NGOs made these women change their plans to businesses.

> *"… we didn't want to do business, or entrepreneurship or anything… we wanted to have an organisation that takes care of our issues and concerns and raise them to the concerned party… we had to register the organisation as a company to enable us* [to ask for] *financial sponsorships for our events… we had to create a name and entity... so we thought of registering it as an organisation, but the procedures are too complicated, so we registered as a company"* **[MA]**

The other less-shared motives were the lack of career prospects or not being satisfied with the work environment (2), which made them think of entrepreneurship as an alternative option.

> *"… I felt the culture of the government* [her job] *doesn't satisfy me any more… automatically, I opened my business* [on the side]*… it is about time"* **[RM]**

> *"I've reached the top of my career, there is no more left... but when the nomination for a higher position is open... and a woman holds 90% of the required qualification and a man holds 75% they will still chose the man candidate despite your qualification* [as a woman] *that's the mind-set... so I thought to myself, I need to see for myself what I like and what I want to do... so I had an interest and wanted to make an NGO not a business... but setting up an NGO is a long process and takes a long time with unnecessary paperwork, while setting up a business is faster and easier and you can still benefit society..."* **[ZR]**

In light of the top-down appointment of Omani women by HM, as mentioned in chapter two, this indicates that women's career progress stops at a certain level and requires the intervention of HM to reach up higher. In my study, two cases of this sort appeared, where these two women felt that they had reached the highest level that an Omani woman could reach, and that there was no more to achieve without the intervention of HM. Thus, they chose to leave their job and start up a business, however, in their hobby, not their profession.

All women except three had another source of income or depended financially on someone else, the husband or family. This might indicate that entrepreneurship is mostly treated as an extra income. Omani women's motives support the point addressed in the current studies on Arab women entrepreneurs from the Gulf states. Women from the wealthier Gulf countries were less motivated by financial rewards (Itani et al., 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014), unlike women from other Arab countries (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Hattab, 2012).

As this section showed, twenty-three women had jobs, seventeen women were moonlighting beside of their jobs; others were housewives or retired, but what seems to encourage them to become part- or full-time entrepreneurs is the government support; this is what the next section covers.

5.3.2 "All about support"

The support the government started to offer from 2013 seems not only to play as a push factor for women to become entrepreneurs, but also seems to shape the associations of the notion of entrepreneurship. For example:

"... women became visible as HM encourages women in all aspects and in entrepreneurship specifically… I was moonlighting in my business until HM's acknowledgement, then the government gave support…." **[SH]**

"… women were doing business at home but they didn't have the capabilities to come out [become visible]*… but after PASMED and Rafad* [Rafad is the funding government entity]*, these women came out and were given support…"* **[NH]**

"Women, they were doing business at home, ok let's take them out… women were trading from home… but the government pulled them out of their homes into the labour market after HM decreed that… the government created an authority to formulate, organise and legalise the entrepreneurship sector... formalising the entrepreneurship sector, women came into the light… they became visible in society through the support of the government" **[HL]**

As the quotes suggest, government involvement and support seem to shape how the notion is developing in Oman. The participants seem to associate the term entrepreneurship with the idea of support. For example:

"... the whole rationale behind the concept of entrepreneurship is the support… so all the buzz about youth business, SMEs and other things… this buzz is all about support…" **[IZ]**

As the analysis of my data showed, support is becoming associated with the term entrepreneurship. Thus, I turn to these women's views on how entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship are understood by them and how is it perceived in Oman in their view.

5.3.3 "Same concept, new term"

This theme presents that the term is considered to be new in the Omani context, but the activity is not. For example:

"… the recognition of the term was not received until HM brought it into light… It was business and now it became entrepreneurship: same concept, new term…" **[HL]**

"... it is the same concept as traditional business, nothing has changed… but the term has changed for the public…" **[BH]**

As the quotes reveal, entrepreneurship seems to be understood as equivalent to traditional home-business, however with a new term. To expand more on this point, for example:

"... there were a lot of women who made a living by selling domestic goods, they raised their kids in this manner but nobody knows about them; they are the invisible women… but women became visible as HM encourages women in all aspects and in entrepreneurship specifically …." **[SH]**

"… women were doing business at home but they didn't have the capabilities to come out [become visible]*… but after PASMED and Rafad* [Rafad is the funding government entity]*, these women came out and were given support… I consider these women as entrepreneurs…"* **[NH, partially repeated]**

My analysis showed that entrepreneurship in terms of activity seems to be equivalent to the traditional home-business – which is not a new activity for Omani women. The newness seems to be developing around visibility and support aspects offered by the government. This might explain why entrepreneurship is culturally accepted and socially practised with no major social resistance. However, the traditional activity seems to be bound to home-business and domestic goods; this I delve into more deeply in the next section.

5.3.4 "Souq" [*market*]

This theme explores further the traditional home-business, as it seems to be perceived as the same as entrepreneurship in terms of activity. This appears to create a challenge for women

who turned their profession into entrepreneurship. These women claim that they could not position themselves among the Omani women entrepreneurs. For example:

> *"… women became visible in society by the support of the government… but women entrepreneurship entered the market as 'souq'* [market]*… there are very few Omani women entrepreneurs, almost none professional… Omani women doing entrepreneurship is like selling… they are selling bukhoor and abaya* [incense and traditional women's wear]*, it is the concept of 'souq'… there are no professional women entrepreneurs in a career path... the market/society does not understand women can do more professional things… when you say you are an entrepreneur, they ask you what do you do? They expect you to sell… women in Oman have a potential career in entrepreneurship, but the market does not accept nor understand what entrepreneurship is"* **[HL]**

'Souq' refers to the idea of a traditional market, where selling domestic goods and home products is popular. It is a tradition and an old practice that takes place on religious and social occasions such as Ramadan and Eid days. Entrepreneurship is becoming constructed around home-business and selling domestic goods, and as the following quotes reveal, anything outside these categories is misunderstood. For example:

> *"where I see it, women entrepreneurs are again self-employed and much more in the home business, Abaya* [Abaya, traditional women's wear]*, bukhoor* [incense]*, dates and cakes, and I feel the woman who is self-employed and outside these categories, they became misunderstood"*
>
> H. By whom? Government or society?
>
> *"Both… as a society, they don't know where to put us, and there aren't many examples in the field…"* **[NM]**

The problem in IA's view is in the lack of standards in Oman has created this problem; she says:

> *"… there is no standard… all women entrepreneurs are one… whether you are educated, or not… whether you are just selling domestic goods, selling dates or you have a marketing agency… there is no difference in the market in terms of standards… even in events… we are considered as one…"* **[IA]**

She adds later,

> *"I feel the standard of women entrepreneurs is very mixed, and I feel that women entrepreneurs are the ones who are famous or successful in being visible in the media… honestly speaking… these women entrepreneurs have no strategic approach… they attend every event, they are all over the media… How do I know them? I follow their news on the media channels, like magazines, and I have noticed that all these women entrepreneurs are in fashion and beauty… and maybe it is the media to blame, that they are only focusing on women entrepreneurs in this sector… and everything I read or follow on this news confirms my assumption… all women's magazines give these glossy titles such as the most powerful women, the most successful and so on… these titles are only for this kind of women, without stating any criteria of how these women were chosen"* **[IA]**

The lack of standards or criteria as highlighted by IA, and the focus of the government on home-business as stated earlier by some participants, seems to create and reinforce the traditional business for women, which seems to leave no room for women who see themselves as professional. As stated by IA, there are no formal criteria, but there might be implicit ones. As she states at the beginning of the above quote "... *and I feel that women entrepreneurs are the ones who are famous or successful in being visible in the media…", this* may seem to be what she feels the criteria are. The lack of known criteria created confusion for this participant and this opens up doors for multiple and subjective interpretations. It also

seems to create a frustration and confusion as to where one stands, how to position oneself and how to negotiate one's entrepreneurship, as a professional woman entrepreneur.

It could be that the media's focus on certain women in certain sectors is reinforcing the limited and traditional stereotypes for Omani women entrepreneurs, which in turn restrict the options and the chances for *professional* women in the Omani market. As mentioned in NM and HL's quotes the lack of examples of professional women entrepreneurs has also contributed to reinforce the traditional home-business for women's entrepreneurship. However, going back to the motives reported in this study, where most of the women in my sample were driven by hobby or interest, could also explain the traditional sectors women are working in. However, my observation is that these professional women are visible in the media with fair coverage; but maybe to them, that is not enough in comparison to women in traditional business. Also, and given that Omani women are driven by hobbies, it could be that the number of women in traditional business exceed the number of women in professional business, which makes professional women a minority in entrepreneurship.

This section suggests that the lack of criteria, the lack of professional examples and the media coverage combined have contributed to perpetuating the traditional home-business perception for Omani women entrepreneurs; but I still believe that there is much more than this, something that is rooted and engraved in our minds that has made women's entrepreneurship acceptable and traditional: that is the story of Khadija.

5.3.5 "Khadija was a trader"

To begin with, Islam did not appear naturally in the interviews. It could be because we are in Muslim country and that Islam and maybe everything – by default – is Islamic in a Muslim,

conservative society like Oman. Also, it could be that because I am a Muslim myself, there is no need to justify things along Islamic lines. However, as a Muslim myself, Islam is not in our daily conversation within our Muslim country. Also, within Muslims communities, Islam is not an issue, but sects are. But for the purpose of my study, I closed the interviews with an abstract question about Islam, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. The question was more about asking their opinion about how Muslim women are perceived in the West (oppressed and suppressed because of religion).

One of the important findings is the significance of Khadija as a role model. For example:

> *"look, Sayda Khadija was a trader, she was the first wife for the prophet, she was older than him, she guided and supported him. At the beginning of his prophecy (Islam), the man felt his strength from this woman… she supported him emotionally and financially, and she was a woman…"* **[ZR]**

> *"Sayda Khadija, the prophet's wife, she was a trader and the prophet liked her and married her although she had men working under her authority… the prophet saw her as a leader that he could rely on… and she was very independent and had a mind of her own…"* **[NS]**

Khadija is perceived as a positive image for Muslim women according to my participants' views. Hence, the above quotes suggest that my participants did not differentiate between trading and entrepreneurship and somehow these two notions appear to them to be the same, which is a point I touch upon in the next section. However, Khadija's traditional trading has been reframed as entrepreneurship in contemporary public discourse, which in turn seems to shape the notion *of* entrepreneurship. Thus, the idea of women trading or doing business is religiously legitimate, historically practised, and socially and culturally accepted.

One of the implications of the references to Khadija may be to make a direct connection between Islam and entrepreneurship. Thus, my analysis showed that entrepreneurship appears to have *religious* roots, which in turn might have made entrepreneurship more appealing culturally in a conservative religious society like Oman.

Also, because the interview was conducted in Arabic, Khadija was described as a trader, which might be a colloquial expression in the Arabic language; but even so, associating Khadija with trading and *entrepreneurship* more recently suggests that there is an overlapping, perhaps different or new understanding of these concepts; these are explored in the next section.

5.3.6 "Rīādat al-aʿmāl" [*pioneer or leader in business*]

Developing on the idea that language plays as a source for the different meanings available to individuals, *and* the way they use language makes and changes the meanings of the notion, I present here the terms that are used to refer to entrepreneurship and the Arabic version of the terms.

My participants used three terms: entrepreneurship, businesswoman and trader. These three words were used *interchangeably* during the interviews unless I stopped the participants to ask them about the differences.

Entrepreneurship is translated into Arabic as the term *rīādat al-aʿmāl*, which contains two words: the first word's meaning is between *pioneer* and *leader-ing*, while the latter refers to *business*; thus, it could be said that the literal Arabic translation of entrepreneurship is *the pioneering or leader-ing in business*. The Arabic phrase for businesswoman is '*ṣāḥibat ʿamal*', which means *business owner*. The Arabic word for trading is '*tijārah*'.

The following extract from RM illustrates this: I asked RM about the difference between entrepreneurship, business and trading, as she kept using them interchangeably during the course of the interview. For example:

> *"okay… doesn't the word entrepreneur in Arabic mean leader?... isn't it the same skills, don't you feel it comes from the idea that it is someone who wants to open up a business, and make money, and do things… don't you think this requires leadership skills in order to do that?... it is about working hard… extra working hours… you have to have the culture of extra in everything… you have to have more knowledge… commitment… whether in the business or in your job, in government or in private…"*
>
> H. But the term entrepreneurship came into the market in 2013?
>
> *"These categories don't make a difference… no difference between businesswoman, women entrepreneurship or trader…"*
>
> H. And which one are you?
>
> *"I am a business… trader means sell and buy in retail… all our old generation were traders… but now, new things came… for example, wedding planner, so this is business not trading… thinking about categories and names is an obstacle in itself… now, let me ask you: through your research, is there any difference? There is not… an entrepreneur is a person who starts from zero, has not inherited the business… while the businessmen are the ones who inherited the business… entrepreneurs didn't inherit… they start from scratch… the trader and businessmen inherited the business"* **[RM]**

RM is a conservative woman who originally came from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior and moved to Muscat after marriage, and she used to work in a managerial position in the government, holds a local higher education, is in her 40s, and started her business as a retirement project.

RM's extract suggests that she contradicts, overlaps and mixes the three terms. Although she tried to explain the differences at a later stage, initially she stated that there are no differences. In my analysis, one of the reasons for the overlapping and the contradictions most likely stems from the usage of these terms in our daily language, especially with businesswoman and trading. The second reason might be the newness of the term entrepreneurship in the Omani market, which as the RM extract indicates, is still evolving and developing. Also, as the Arabic version of entrepreneurship implies the pioneer/leader aspect, the association between 'taking a lead' and the understanding of the notion of entrepreneurship seems to be shared by all my participants. For example:

> *"it includes leadership, financial resources, capital… and I feel it is like power and authority… you know marketing, capital and leadership, if someone has these three, he is a successful entrepreneur*" **[IA]**
>
> *"... entrepreneur, you must have leadership skills, it is decision making, problem solving. These things are what makes the person an entrepreneur whether they are running a business or working in the private sector or whatever…"* **[HL]**

To clarify the leadership aspect, as an Arab myself, leadership in our spoken language is taking a lead in something, whether it is new or a change. The emphasis is put on 'taking a lead' more than the individualistic aspect of the leader; it is not seen as breaking the norm as much as taking charge of something and becoming a pioneer in it. This clarification is not academic, but it is mine, and I assume my participants' understanding of what leadership/pioneer means and the usage in Arabic; as the way they described entrepreneurship and entrepreneur is within pioneering and leading lines.

One of the implications of the Arabic version of the term entrepreneurship is the domination of the leadership aspect in understanding the notion. Although the Arabic version contains two words – pioneer/leader in business – the leadership aspect seems to overshadow the business aspect or any other aspect. For example:

> *"... my definition is that entrepreneurship is not business… it is not managing your accounts or financials… you can hire someone to do that for you... it is not about how much cash you have in your bank account, or break-even or profit you are making… it is about risk taking… not opening a shop… it is not the business you inherited… and you are working in your father or grandfather's business…"* **[SW, partially repeated]**

> *"... businesswoman or businessman… they would do whatever it takes to make money… without ethics… could be 'hidden trade'… it could be anything that generates money, run the business… make people do the work for you… you don't have to have the characteristics; but entrepreneur, you must have leadership skills... So, I think personally, that entrepreneurship is a skill, a talent that a person has… born with it, I think… life shapes it up… some leaders are born to be leaders, it is genetics… and the same with entrepreneurs… they are born with it… and then when they go through life, they shape it up, whether they have their own business or they have their own career…"* **[HL]**

The way this participant understands and defines entrepreneurship is in essentialist terms; which is the traditional/orthodox view of conceptualising notions. The way people talk reflects the way they think, and although my study is built on a social constructionist perspective, some of the participants of my study seem to define notions in a more essentialist perspective and with fixed terms, which perhaps reflects how HL in particular thinks.

Within the *language* realm, linguistically the default in speaking and writing in Arabic is with a male noun/pronoun. This has been evidenced among my participants despite their backgrounds and educational levels. For example:

> "... *if someone has these three* [marketing, capital and leadership]*, he is a successful entrepreneur*" **[IA, repeated]**

> *"... entrepreneurship means a person who brings a new idea that serves the society… he can contribute to society, but at the same time, meets his ends…"* **[BH]**

The domination of a male pronoun and the gendered language in the mainstream literature has been raised by the critical feminist, post-structuralist and critical theorists in contemporary entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009). The results of my study show that superficially this gendered language is the norm among my Omani women participants and is practised in our spoken language.

My data suggest that firstly, my women are using the word in different, overlapping and contradictory ways, which demonstrate the idea that the concept is new and evolving. The phrases overlapping with entrepreneurship are trader and businesswoman. Although the last two phrases are older, it seems that they intertwine in terms of activity. Entrepreneurship on the other hand with its Arabic version seems to still be evolving and developing and is most likely not established yet, despite the existence of the official category.

5.3.7 "Woman or man… makes no difference"

Despite the gendered *language*, entrepreneurship is perceived by my participants as a gender-neutral occupation. For example:

> *"…. whether you are a woman or a man, it makes no difference…"* **[BH]**

"... I don't think there is any difference between men and women... men can have success in their business, so can women..." **[NH]**

"... from my experience in business there is no difference between men and women… the same problems that are faced by women are faced by men…" **[AR]**

The whole issue of gendering occupations in terms of character and traits associated with certain occupation that is widely discussed in the Western literature of entrepreneurship (e.g. Acker, 1992) does not seem to be similar to how occupations are perceived in the Omani context. The determination of suitability of an occupation for women in the Omani context seems to rely on: first, the sex-segregation environment; and second, the physical activity based on biological sex.

Against this background, my analysis suggests that any job or occupation that requires a high level of mixing with non-relative opposite sex persons is most likely to be perceived as unsuitable for women. In a sex-segregated society, women are expected to work in every occupation that serves women, such as doctors, nurses, policewomen, cashiers and waiters.

5.3.8 Summary

In this first part of the results chapter, I opted to explore the meanings and associations of entrepreneurship as understood by Omani women entrepreneurs. I started by exploring their motives to become an entrepreneur. Interestingly, most of the women's entrepreneurship grows out of their hobbies or interests. Very few turned their profession or education into entrepreneurship. However, most have had jobs and many women used to moonlight beside of their job. After 2013, women became full-time entrepreneurs with government support. Thus, the idea of support is becoming associated with the term entrepreneurship.

However, the term is perceived to be new, not the activity. As the analysis suggests, the concept of entrepreneurship is perceived to be equivalent to traditional home-business. It is not perceived to be a profession or in a professional sector; it is limited to traditional sectors and in trading/selling domestic goods.

One of the underpinning ideas that seem to enhance the perception of traditional business is the example of Khadija, the prophet's wife. Also, Khadija's example seems to create a link between Islam and entrepreneurship; which seems to give entrepreneurship a positive impact.

The third point that may play a role in shaping the meaning is the language. As the analysis above showed, the Arabic version of the word entrepreneurship holds different connotations compared to the English one. Also, there are three phrases used interchangeably when referring to entrepreneurship. This reinforces the idea that the notion is new and that it is still evolving and developing.

Finally, as the data suggested, entrepreneurship is perceived as gender-neutral. Although linguistically the male pronoun is the dominant norm in the Arabic language, in sex-segregated societies women are expected to work in everything. Therefore, occupations are not described in terms of characteristic traits as addressed and discussed in the Western mainstream literature. However, as the following section demonstrates, there are many ways in which women's entrepreneur-ing does, indeed, differ from men's.

5.4 Part Two: Perceived contextual influences on doing entrepreneur-ing

This part captures the perceived contextual influences that shaped the doings of entrepreneur-ing. The main perceived key contextual influences are tribalism, government,

family and religion/culture. Most of the perceived key contextual influences that are identified here have not been identified in the women's entrepreneurship literature. Some have been recognised but in different ways; and some contrast what has been identified in the existing mainstream literature. The following sections present the perceived key contextual influences that are identified in this study.

5.4.1 Tribalism

One of the key perceived contextual influences that is shaping the doing of women's entrepreneurship is tribalism.

> *"tribalism still exists in Oman… and I don't think it will disappear easily"* **[RM]**
>
> *"... our tribes... position us in society"* **[MA]**

The ways in which tribalism seems to affect women's entrepreneurship appeared in different ways; it could be constraining and liberating in different ways. For example:

> *"I guess if I was from another tribe, things would have been easier… girls from less conservative tribes are expected to deal with other men, less conservative in their outfit* [no Abaya: black dress]*, and communicate freely with others. The social acceptance for these girls' less conservative behaviour is because of the tribes they come from; but that is not the case for my tribe… my tribe is judged by everything I do or say; my father keeps reminding me of this fact…"* **[MA]**

I asked a direct question about whether she thinks that her tribal name affects her entrepreneurship, she says:

> *"Yes… I feel we girls* [from conservative tribes] *we are not allowed to do so many things that those from other tribes* [less conservative] *are allowed to do… to the extent I feel I want to be either from X or Y tribes* [she names them and one of them is my tribe] *so I can live with the freedom they have, or the social acceptance; we do not have either,*

society does not accept us… there is an image/typology of us... I feel the tribal name is a heavy weight, and I have to take care and maintain the tribe's reputation, I always think that I have to do things in the right way so I do not cause any damage… especially if I am in public… because my success is a success for the whole tribe…" **[MA]**

MA comes from an Arab conservative tribe and lives in the suburbs of Muscat; she is in her twenties, married with children, and lives with her in-laws. She holds a local Bachelor's degree and worked for a short period in the private sector. Her business is based on her interest and her business sector requires mixing with the opposite sex as employees and as clients; her business activity requires appearing at public events quite frequently. According to her, she is the first woman in her tribe who is in business, and this sort of business activity; however, her business is not her only income.

Her quotes suggest that the reputation of her tribe shapes her entrepreneurial activities. The conservative level seems to be the issue at stake. The conservative reputation of the tribe seems to determine how she thinks about the social expectations placed on her by her tribe and by the public, and accordingly, how she negotiates her entrepreneurship and gender. As seen further below, my analysis shows that the tribal name seems to stand as the first entry point to entrepreneurship. The tribal name appears to overshadow gender, entrepreneurship/business activity, qualification, and any other categories that might be of significance elsewhere. This seems to affect how women do entrepreneur-ing. For example:

"... whenever I need anything from anyone, because of my tribe, and my father's name, I get whatever I ask for… I get anything I want… but then I have to be generous with those people, more than just a business deal… because the main reason for support is the family and the tribe's name; so if I am not generous enough, this will harm my tribal and family reputation…" **[RM]**

RM comes from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior; she is in her forties, married with children, and lives in Muscat with her husband and children. She has a local higher education. She moved to Muscat after marriage. She used to work for the government and her business is her retirement project. Her business is based on her interest and occasionally requires mixing with the opposite sex and public appearances.

As the RM quote demonstrates, her tribal reputation seems to open doors for opportunities and possibilities in business deals. She did not mention gender or qualifications or any other methods in negotiating her entrepreneurship. Her story suggests that she is capitalising strongly on her tribal name, and she has the cultural repertoire to do so. Meaning, the notion of generosity is a way to negotiate and maintain relationships in Oman, which implies exchanging favours and other things that seem to determine how entrepreneurship is done.

Interestingly, RM informed me that a woman's name should not be mentioned publicly in the region she comes from. She tells me an example from her story: she had a project with the government; a minister was leading this project. At the end of the project, the minister was interviewed on national TV and thanked her without mentioning her name. She says:

> *"at the end, the minister thanked me on national TV without bringing my name up, he said the women who comes from X region… she did this and that… he mentioned my achievements… without mentioning my name… all my family called me immediately…"*
>
> H. Did he do that deliberately?
>
> *"this minister is from another interior conservative region which shares a similar condition of women…"* **[RM]**

In this case, not mentioning a woman's name is a sign that one understands and respects the local/interior culture. In these cases, the public face is usually the brother, which is the case

with RM's business. The involvement of the brothers and male family members is touched upon in further detail in the family section.

In the following examples, the next two women originally came from conservative but small tribes from the interior but were raised in Muscat as their families moved when they were young. These two cases differ but support the significance of tribe in a different way and support the claims made above.

In the first example, SH was explaining to me her struggle in the workplace, which was the main reason to open a hobby-related business on the side. So I asked her if she thinks her experience would have been different if she was a man, she answered:

> *"It would have been different… but it depends on which tribe I come from"* **[SH]**

The second case is MAW, who partnered with a woman from a tribe that seems to have a stronger reputation in business and connections then hers; she says in this regard:

> *"I started alone... I thought I don't have the right network, I need someone who can connect me with organisations, or someone who already has a name or title… especially as we are in a tribal society so her name* [the partner] *enhances connections… the Omani market is based on relationships"* **[MAW]**

These quotes were extracted from women who come from conservative tribes, mostly the interior. These women mentioned tribes during the interview without me asking about it, in contrast to the women from ethnic groups/tribes who come from Muscat who did not mention tribes unless asked. So I asked them whether they think their tribal name made any difference. For example:

"definitely as my tribe are known to be successful in business… we are very business-minded… and you know, you do see a lot of my tribe who are successful…" **[SJ]**

"… they [society and authority] *always treated me with respect, even though I speak my own mind, but I am always respected… I guess the name I hold has saved me on a couple of occasions… maybe not saving, but giving more time to clarify… they stop talking and start listening to me when I speak… the name also helped me in terms of connections"* **[NM]**

"there is always a perception whether it is good or bad… I don't introduce myself with my tribal name, I don't want them to see me in a certain frame so they [clients/others] *become less biased… it was very strange that when I do presentations with big, well-exposed and well-established CEOs and businessmen… the first questions I get asked once I am done with the presentation are who is my father and which tribe do I come from… they have to frame me within these frames…"*

H. Why?

"It helps them to make decisions"

H. From which perspective?

"… trust…"

H. Even in business decisions?

"it is more so in business, much more" **[IA]**

As these quotes reveal, the tribal reputation in business has benefited these women and seems to determine to a certain extent how they conduct their entrepreneurship. These quotes also support the claim stated above, that tribalism seems to stand as an entry point to entrepreneurship and seems to overshadow gender, qualifications and the business itself.

All the examples given here indicate that women negotiate on the tribal card; they capitalise on it if they hold a strong tribal reputation; and they negotiate within the tribal category if

their tribal reputation is small (as the example of MAW). Tribalism in this regard becomes the umbrella that women negotiate/practise their business within; it seems that their entrepreneur-ing is determined within the tribal name.

As the data suggest, tribalism is perceived to be significant in the Omani context. It plays one of the key perceived contextual influences that shapes how entrepreneurship and gender are practised and done. The issue of tribalism has not been recognised in the literature on women's entrepreneurship, or the literature on Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship.

As the analysis of the data showed, the perceived influence of the tribe is the first entry point for women into entrepreneurship in Oman. Tribalism seems to delineate the social expectations of society about who is expected to become an entrepreneur, and who is not. As stated above, tribalism seems to overshadow gender, qualifications and business sector. Also, the tribal name seems to offer network, business deals and trust. As echoed by the presented quotes, women are aware of the impact their tribe has on them and have capitalised and practised their entrepreneur-ing within tribalism in different ways.

5.4.2 Government

The second key perceived contextual influence is the governmental practices that seems to play a significant role in shaping how the women in my sample do entrepreneurship and gender. As the data presented below show, the governmental practices shaped how women negotiated their entrepreneurial activity and gender practices.

5.4.2.1 "Pleasing the father"

This theme evolves around the perceived impact of the political leader in creating a change in Omani society. According to my data, all participants believed that the interest and the

attention given to entrepreneurship in Oman are because of HM's acknowledgment and call for entrepreneurship. For example:

> *"… if HM did not conduct the symposium, if there was no royal decree, no one would ever care…"* **[IA]**
>
> *"… if you noticed, the whole wave of entrepreneurship happened only when HM spoke about it…"* **[BH]**
>
> *"I don't think anything would have happened if HM didn't speak about it… Riyada* [PASMED] *would not have existed… banks would have never given loans… companies would've never made any support programme… I don't think all of this would happen..."* **[NM]**

As the quotes demonstrate, the attention towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in Oman are perceived to be the results of HM's intervention. Thus, although there is one government entity that is the official umbrella for entrepreneurship (PASMED), there are some other government entities that are also involved, in addition to the private sector and political leaders. According to my participants, all the support offered to entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs is to show HM that they (different parties) are following his call; as shown in the following example:

> *"... Look, when you have a father who's very loving, you want to please this father… and you want to show him your best… So, for us* [Omanis]*, HM is our father and we want to show him we are doing very well…"* **[BS]**

Seemingly, this practice of showing positivity to the leadership has led to a competition between these organisations and different parties, as described in the following quote:

> *"… there is a competition between government entities and political figures; when women entrepreneurs become successful and seen in the media, the credit goes to who supported her, who had her back..."* **[SH]**

As the data showed, the government's concern seems to evolve around showing HM that his call is met. Putting women under the spotlight more precisely is perceived to show HM that two of his interests are being met: women and entrepreneurship. For example:

> *"*[women's entrepreneurship] *is taking a big space* [in the public domain] *and support that is offered to women … but that is natural, they* [the government] *have to show that they are supporting women"* **[SB]**

> *"… TV* [national channel] *is always looking, radio is always looking, magazines are always looking for women to interview… they just want any women … they are doing this to show HM that we have women entrepreneurs..."* **[EW]**

The participants of my study reported recognition and strong publicity, and believe that it is because they are women, and because supporting women is one of the main personal interests of HM; which forces the government and other organisations to focus on and support women. This recognition and strong publicity has changed women entrepreneurs' lives. For example:

> *"I became famous… I was photographed next to the minister… I was everywhere in the media... I was on TV and newspapers… people became nicer and friendlier to me… everybody knows me… they've all heard of me…"* **[AH]**

> *"… I was very impressed when I got selected to represent the country* [fully sponsored] *in a regional conference... as an Omani woman entrepreneur and… showcasing Oman in terms of SMEs and stuff… "* **[HL]**

The analysis of my data suggests two main issues at stake here; first, how change takes place in Oman and second, how Omani women's condition is changing in Oman.

In the case of the former, as the above first three quotes in this section suggested, women believed that the whole attention towards entrepreneurship is a result of HM's call, and things would have not changed if HM did not call for it. This model of change implies a top-down model of change; this seems to be the norm in Omani society where leadership initiates change. For example:

> *"In our country, the instructions must come from the leader; in our case, HM is the leader... this is everywhere, when the leader says anything, the followers will listen…"* **[ZR]**

In this regard, some women expressed critical views towards this form of change; one of these women is from Muscat and the other is originally from the interior but grew up and lives in Muscat. They said:

> *"… if HM did not conduct the symposium, if there was no royal decree, no one would ever care… we* [as Omanis] *always wait for something, anything from HM, we never initiate… we have to wait for something, then we move…"* **[IA, partially repeated]**

> *"... we are grateful that HM did the symposium and brought* [entrepreneurship] *into the light… but; unfortunately, what's happening here is HM needs to appear in public and tell people what to do. He needs to come out and say drink water because water is healthy, he needs to say that we shouldn't be driving fast on the roads…"* **[SW]**

These critical views depicted government and society as passive and reactive; they suggest how these women see change taking place in Oman. Within the same model of change, the second point of my results pinpoints how women believe their condition has changing in Oman:

> *"... they just want any women… they are doing this to show HM that we have women entrepreneurs..."* **[EW, partially repeated]**

The analysis of my data showed that women felt that they are supported because of HM's encouragement to Omani women in all aspects, and entrepreneurship is just part of this:

> *"... women became visible as HM encourages women in all aspects and in entrepreneurship specifically..."* **[SH, partially repeated]**

As the analysis showed, my study's twenty-nine women did not report any major problem facing them as women entrepreneurs in Omani society. Partially, this implies social acceptance of this model of change for women's condition, on top of how entrepreneurship is perceived. Also, this implies that social acceptance is most likely granted to this top-down model of change rather than bottom-up initiatives of individuals. This assumption resonates with the historical development of women's condition in Oman as presented in chapter two, where women's rights are always 'given', and not asked for.

5.4.2.2 "Spoiled like children"

This is the second theme under the perceived governmental practices that present how women entrepreneurs felt they are treated, and accordingly, how they negotiate and do their entrepreneur-ing and gender. For example:

> *"what I have noticed being a female… I'm treated very differently… from males… I get… you know special attention… I'm supported more… and we are spoiled like children, I can say… for example, I have been hearing from my male colleagues saying… to get… your business registered it takes you ages… I got it in half an hour…"* **[SI]**

Another example:

> *"… but maybe because I am a woman, I am celebrated more…"* **[NM]**

The analysis showed that some participants felt that the government is favouring women over men in entrepreneurship. In some cases, some women felt they are treated better than others, irrespective of gender. For example,

> *"… they have adopted me, I know they treat me more differently than others..."*
>
> H. Why?
>
> *"... because my mentality is different, because I am not one of the complainers, and I am not of these people who demand things. When I speak to them, I speak 1, 2, 3* [plainly] *asking for support, and this support is mostly technical or advice"*
>
> H. So you knew what kind of support you would need to have?
>
> *"Yes, I knew what I needed and they do provide the support"* **[NM]**

As the quotes reveal, some women felt they are treated like children or adopted children, which does not seem to be a problem for them. These women are aware of this and it seems they are accepting of and negotiating within this parent–child relationship. As I see it, these women are taking advantage and capitalising on it and entrepreneur-ing within it.

In addition, one of the participants (MH) stated that the government is pushing women more than men to become entrepreneurs. Also, she mentioned that the decision makers in the authorities are all men, even in women's entrepreneurship issues. For example:

> *"... I feel women are given more support and facilities then men in PASMED... the decision makers in the authority do not argue or discuss any details with women... they give women all they want... just to push them to become entrepreneurs... because they are women... and... all the decision makers at PASMED are men..."* **[MH]**

This quote reinforces the idea that men are in the authority positions and taking decisions for women in Omani society.

However, not all women shared the feeling of being spoiled or adopted. For example:

> *"HM made the authority for SMEs for many objectives, maybe they have achieved one or two or three, but not the one that serves and helps the youth… PASMED have a location now, programmes, mentoring, training, support, workshops and other stuff… but the only people who benefited from these programmes are the ones who are free and have the inclination for it, the busy ones didn't benefit… because they can't go to these programmes. PASMED must come to the field and look for entrepreneurs and guide them through… for PASMED and the government, you have to go to them… but in the UAE, the government looks for entrepreneurs and makes a big deal out of them, while this entrepreneur stays at home and does something small… but in Oman, we have to go and do everything, we have to complete papers from one ministry or another, and at the end of the day, you come home very depressed…"*
>
> H. Why?
>
> *"because you can't get anything done in the ministries… they will make things difficult for you, they will not complete your papers, they will complicate everything"* **[NS]**

Another example:

> *"… they* [the government] *are encouraging women entrepreneurs, but there is no real support… all that they are doing is seeking successful businesses that were already there, they take them* [women entrepreneurs], *bring them into the spotlight… I have won an award, but because I was already established, not because of any support I received..."* **[FBS]**

The analysis showed that the similarities and differences between the supported and the non-supported entrepreneurs can be highlighted in three points: first, tribe; second, educational background; third, work experience. For the first point, both the supported ones come from ethnic groups/tribes in Muscat. Second, they both received a Western education. Third, both had good positions in international organisations. Unlike the unsupported ones, both come

from conservative tribes, one from the interior, and one from the suburbs of Muscat. Both had moderate local education. One is a housewife and the second was working in a government branch in her local area. In light of the parent–child model, it appears that the parent is choosing who is ready, or perhaps not, to become an entrepreneur.

> *"... maybe because I am a woman, I am celebrated more... as a role model... as a successful story... we don't have role models"* **[NM, partially repeated]**

The analysis shows that these women feel they are celebrated and supported by the government to set them up as a role model for Omani women entrepreneurs. Given the term is officially new and it is still in the making, the government is supporting these women but simultaneously discarding others.

It appears to me that these women, who are potential role models, were exploring their new role as role models and entrepreneurs within this government's indulgence.

5.4.2.3 "Relationships... the fifth power"

Forming a relationship with the government seems to be a significant issue in Oman; the chances of succeeding as entrepreneur without the support of the government seem to be slim; this seems to determine how women entrepreneur. For example:

> *"… I recently approached PASMED, I was quite late… I was trying to approach clients through my own network, and online… I read press releases…* [mentioning the clients she was trying to approach and how, and how she expressed a struggle in that]*… then, we noticed that other entrepreneurs are getting business deals and we are not although our profile and work are better… I was wondering and asking myself why? It is all about network and relationships in Oman, it is the fifth power… I have reached a conclusion that it is all about relationships and not qualifications… these people are active with the government network by being present in all the government events…*

we were busy working at the very same time…. the government emphasis on the [frequent] *visits… they need to see you in order to give you projects and connect you with clients… the criteria here are completely different"* **[IA]**

In IA's story, she highlights some important key points: first, establishing relationships builds connections and seems to overshadow qualifications in the Omani market. Second, clients and organisations seem to be reluctant to deal with Omani SMEs, unless recommended or maybe imposed by the government. Third, opportunities seem to be created by the government; and finally, independent behaviour is most likely discouraged.

As encountered and expressed by almost all the participants, the relationship with the government seems to be significant. The dominance of the government in their stories in practising entrepreneurship appears in many aspects: such as network, business deals, easing bureaucracy and others. As a result, an entrepreneur must become an ally of the government in order to succeed. However, registering with the government as an entrepreneur, which initially entitles for government support, might also give the impression of the need for help, and perhaps consents to the dominance of the government.

Women in my study were aware of the strong role played by the government. The story of IA is an example that shows the challenges faced in the market without government support, which made her eventually seek government support. In some cases, they believed they established one already, yet sustained a good relationship with the government just in case for potential opportunities in the future. Almost all my participants ensured frequent visits to the government. For example:

"they have different criteria… you have to attend all the events organised by the government, every week there are three to four events… forums… they come and tell

you we didn't see you, they question … I tell them I was working, I have to work… they don't get it… their checklist is different… then, we had to plot our way in a different way [change their approach]*"* **[IA]**

She adds later:

"… I used to see these events as a total waste of time; some people are very active, but we were not… sometimes you need to read a book for a project or a proposal, I prefer to read them than attend an event… apparently, that does not work here… you lose, you lose people, you lose network… nobody knows you…" **[IA]**

Other examples:

"... you have to visit them over and over… you have to keep visiting them… frequently" **[BH]**

"… I do drop a visit from now and then, just to find out what is happening" **[NM]**

As the quotes show, participants maintain a good relationship with the government in different ways; one of those shared and practised by almost all my participants is frequent visits. The benefits of maintaining this relationship vary; however, not maintaining it might put women entrepreneurs in a position of losing network and business deals. As pointed out by some participants, business deals and potential clients are mediated through the government; and therefore, women entrepreneurs believe they must invest in this relationship.

5.4.2.4 "Your stuff are Qaboosi"

Within the government category, this theme sheds light on an element that seems to be important in the business that the government supports, the businesses with an Omani identity. For example:

> *"… my work relates to HM… we do things in the business that is related to his appearance* [HM's appearance in public is a big event in Oman]*… this is what HM taught us, to include Oman in everything we do… I adopted that national direction…"* **[RM]**

RM is in her 40s, higher local education, retired, and comes from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior.

The second example is for RH, she is in her twenties, local education, has never worked before and comes from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior, but was born and brought up in Muscat.

> *"nowadays the youth are interested in this combination* [traditional and modernity] *and care about Omani stuff… that makes me proud… because I feel that this is the pay-off of HM's efforts, he was the first to call for paying attention to our heritage… the most important things are our heritage and identity… now the youth are embodying the Omani identity in their products and services… and so do I… I was the one who introduced the past to the youth through my products..."* **[RH]**

Then she adds later:

> *"… I told you, our path in the business is towards nationalism…"* **[RH]**

The last example with nationalism orientation is for AK. AK told me about how her products are perceived when she showcased them in regional exhibitions and events. She said that in one event, the guest of honour commented on her products *"your stuff are 'Qaboosi'* [Qaboos is HM's name]*";* she said that this moment made her feel: *"… you feel like Oh My God! I've reached where I wanted*" **[AK]**. AK is in her fifties, Western education, retired, from an ethnic group/tribe from Muscat.

As the analysis demonstrates, the examples mentioned above are from women who clearly state that their business has an Omani identity. To these women, the national identity evolves around HM. Based on the analysis, these women are supported and promoted by the government. To the contrary, a business without national identity spirit seems to get less support or to take longer to get acceptance from the government. For example:

> *"… I suppose any idea is new here, and I feel it is here for the first time… therefore it gets lost in the registration, they don't understand it and can't analyse it… the people in the government who are responsible for implementation don't understand the idea… it was never written in papers or forms… unfortunately, the idea gets lost, it doesn't fit the templates… it gets lost at the registration level… you face difficulties…"* **[NM]**

IZ talked about her struggle with the government:

> *"… it was the third time we put our proposal ahead… then I realised that they* [the government] *don't understand…"* **[IZ]**

As the above quotes show, the challenge seems to be with the new ideas that do not fit the template. One can draw from the above quotes and from previous quotes throughout this section: the government seems to support traditional sectors and ideas, and is keen to support business ideas with a national flavour; but ideas that do not fit within these two lines take time to become accepted.

As the data in this section demonstrate, the government has played the second perceived key contextual influence in shaping the experience of Omani women's entrepreneurship. The impact of the government in shaping how women do entrepreneur-ing is perceived in different ~~ways remarkable~~. The first impact is the strong support and encouragement that the government is offering to women entrepreneurs, which has pulled women into becoming

entrepreneurs and becoming very visible in society. The second impact is the parenting style that the government is practising with women, which seems to shape what is offered for them, and who it is offered to. The third impact is the role of the government in creating possibilities and opportunities for women entrepreneurs; and the forth impact is the kinds of projects the government is supporting, which might constrain women in how they can entrepreneur and what kinds of sectors and services they can entrepreneur in.

5.4.3 Family

The third key perceived contextual influence is family. Family has been identified in the literature, mainstream and critical studies, but the way in which family played a role in determining how my participants' do entrepreneur-ing and gender differs from how it is discussed in the literature for women in different contexts. I divided the impact and the role of the family into the following points: the shadow of a male figure, and mothering (my sons).

5.4.3.1 The shadow of a male figure

The way family played out in the experience of my participants differs from any other way reported in the literature. To begin with, women entrepreneurs seem to need their family's support in order to become an entrepreneur; as acknowledged in the studies on Arab women (e.g. Tlaiss, 2014; Erogul, 2011) and supported in the following quote:

> *"… they* [women entrepreneurs] *have very strong relationship with their parents… I think that's one of the key factors..."* **[FB]**

In most of the cases in my study, women reported different ways of needing family support and involvement in doing entrepreneur-ing in light of family structure, relations and gender roles. For example:

"… I used to bring my little brothers on board in everything I do, and I depend on them… that gives me strength, and also that send a message to others that she is not alone and cannot be taken advantage of… my brothers were always supportive, since they were little" **[NS]**

"the minister said, when I turn right I find her, when I turn left, I find her brother X, when I turn elsewhere I find her brother Y… I bring all my brothers with me…. Sometimes, even my male cousins…" **[RM]**

As the analysis suggests, women entrepreneurs involved their male family members in their business, although their business is not a family business. The male member's involvement has been reported in many cases, especially in the ones which require public appearances or mixed-sex environments. As the above quotes show, the physical presence of a male family member is important. This physical presence indicates that women are not alone; to women entrepreneurs, the male relative involvement sends a message that they are protected and supported.

To clarify why there is the need for this physical presence, the following example is extracted from BH's story:

"I don't travel alone."

H. You don't travel alone?

"No."

H. Who do you take with you?

"Any one of my nephews…"

H. So someone must accompany you?

"Yes, it is a must, someone must travel with me... I feel comfortable that someone is with me… and you know… socially it is inappropriate to travel alone" **[BH]**

As stated, in BH's point of view, it is socially inappropriate for women to appear alone. Thus, women overcame this challenge through the following gender practices:

"I told you that the main reason why I am successful is because my husband is understanding and open-minded"

H. So you consider yourself successful?

"Yes."

H. What is success to you?

"Being able to do what you are passionate about without any constraints, I don't have any… I can travel tomorrow to go to visit a factory in Europe… I don't have to take a man with me, because I am a woman I can't travel alone, and a man must come with me … you know, your brother… your brother needs to take leave from his work and travel with you… I don't have this… you know what I mean?" **[EW]**

In EW's extract, her husband's support and explicit consent freed her from following what seems like the norm and the conventional approach of male family members' involvement; but that is only because of her husband, is supportive and allows her to change the norm and negotiate her entrepreneurial activity in a different, unconventional way; which is in this case, travelling alone for entrepreneurship.

Another form of the importance of male family members is reported in the following extract from IA's story.

"I didn't like to use my brother's name, I would've always felt that I live in his shadow, I will always be associated with him… my perception of myself will not be honest… sometimes when I am in need, I do talk to my brother to use his network, but I try as much as I can to avoid it" **[IA]**

IA, among others, reported the need to be associated with a male family member's name, a father or a husband. As my data showed, my participants felt that they cannot do entrepreneur-ing without a shadow of a male relative's family name, even though this male member is not part of their business. For example:

"... you can't get anything done... if you are not a daughter of someone big, or haven't got a recommendation from someone big, too…" **[NS, repeated]**

"when I first started a couple of years back, a woman told me something that is engraved in my mind, she said if your husband is not a trader, how are you supposed to be one? if your father isn't one, how are going to became one? if your brother or anyone from your surroundings are not doing business, how will you become a businesswoman?; so I was trying to understand what she said from a social perspective, that if I don't have a husband who is in a powerful position, or a businessman; then I won't be able to get any deals, and no one will do business with me" **[MAW]**

"... because of my tribe, and my father's name, I get whatever I ask for… I get anything I want…" **[RM, partially repeated]**

She adds later:

"I never say whose daughter I am… but when I went to meet the minister, he knew who my father was before I even spoke…" **[RM]**

As the data demonstrate, women entrepreneurs in my sample are aware of the importance of the male's name and the shadow, and the need of these in women's life. It seems that the shadow is an important part of being a woman, as expressed in the following quote:

"I see myself as self-made… I didn't depend on a man to gain my identity… I don't want to…"

H. Is that because our identity relies on a father? or a husband?

"a father or a husband… they are the cover…" **[MA]**

Although MA perceives herself as not depending on a male relative, she mentioned that she involved her brothers in her entrepreneurship. Also, I have met MA's father and brothers at an event for her company which she invited me to during the course of this PhD. This implies that the idea of needing a male shadow is a taken-for-granted gender practice in Omani society, and probably not perceived as dependency or constraining.

As the data demonstrate, women entrepreneurs in my sample are aware of the importance of the name and the shadow. The ones who can are capitalising on it; even though some were trying to avoid it, but could not. The ones who do not have a strong shadow expressed more challenges, but expressed the need to associate their name with a powerful male figure, as the following example reveals:

"… I was moonlighting in my business until HM's acknowledgement, then the government gave support…. I participated in a 'creative exhibition' which was conducted a couple of years back… my booth was the first in the location… when I saw the minister… I knew that this was my chance… this was my chance, I had only three seconds… I introduced myself to him as an Omani girl who makes this product… so he replied: 'This is not creativity but stay here and I will come back to you'. He came back after an hour, he gave us an appointment in his office the next day. After the meeting, he appointed a consultant to help us... He [the minister] *also made another quasi-government institution pay for all our expenses of branding and training under their Social Corporate Responsibility projects… the minister supported us all the way until we were ready to launch, he took the initiative to introduce us in the market… we were photographed next to him; we became celebrities overnight…"* **[SH]**

Ministers' support, who are male, appeared in six more cases. Some women considered this as a part of the minister's duty, and some considered it as a personal characteristic of the minister. In the above case and the other cases, women entrepreneurs and their business became associated with the minister's name; it happened that all ministers who were offering support are male. It seems that the shadow of the male's name helped women accelerate their business. Seemingly, families were involved too. As ZR puts it, *"… he introduced his family to me…"*.

In this example among others, families get introduced to each other. It seems this practice of family involvement has a social meaning. I asked about how this kind of relationship works in a professional relationship,

> H. Why? Isn't this a professional relationship?
>
> *"so their family allow them to be with me, especially the girls, their fathers must be involved… for example, I need to speak to the father if we have to stay late… sometimes I speak to the mother…"*

Another example:

> *"... I tell him* [her brother] *all the details on a daily basis…"*
>
> H. You told him because he is your brother or to keep him posted with your…
>
> *"both, first, he is my brother and he is my closest friend… to me, I am honest with him in so many things and on so many levels… I want to keep this trust between us… because in the end, if anything happens I know he is going to be there for me… because he is updated 24/7… he knows where am I, where I go, where I am coming from… I do it voluntarily not because I have to… to me it is something natural"* **[FB]**

As the analysis demonstrates, some women associated themselves with a male's name even if not family relative, however with the family's consent or under the family's supervision. As

the data showed, women seem to need a shadow and are most likely not seen as an individual without a shadow. Accordingly, women negotiate their entrepreneur-ing and their gender within the shadow of a male figure.

The shadow of a male figure is what my women entrepreneurs seem to need publicly. I turn in the next section to what seems to be an internal gender practice in their entrepreneur-ing and gendering.

5.4.3.2 "My sons"

This theme presents how some of my participants employ and treat their Omani male employees. Given that Omanisation is enforced in certain sectors and jobs, women entrepreneurs were not given choice of the employee's nationality or gender in some cases. Therefore, the mothering style seems to apply to Omani male employees specifically. For example:

> *"most of them* [male employees] *are younger than me, maybe only one who is one year older, and I know his wife and children"*
>
> H. So you know all the wives and the children of your colleagues?
>
> *"Yes…"*
>
> H. Why? Isn't this a professional relationship?
>
> *"so their family allow them to be with me, especially the girls, their fathers must be involved… for example, I need to speak to the father if we have to stay late… sometimes I speak to the mother…"*

She started mentioning some incidents where the families were involved, then went back to her relationship with her male employees:

"… I feel they respect me a lot, maybe because I am older, they told me that they see me as a role model…"

H. Do you treat them as your brothers or sons?

"my sons, even the older ones" **[MA]**

In another example, EW told me she had young Omani employees that she was encouraging to study and work with her as part-timers. So I asked her why she did that; she answered,

"those are our youth, they are my children [little boys]*"* **[EW]**

It is interesting to see how the above women treated their Omani male employees. As the analysis of my results showed, in family-centred societies it seems that a woman is accepted at top position / in authority only when she is a mother. Echoing this in entrepreneur-ing and doing gender, my participants who had male Omani employees treated them like a mother would, and somehow they employed male Omanis who are either of a similar age or younger.

I had two cases of this sort, as not all the women needed to employee male Omanis, as it depends on the business sector and size.

The analysis of the data demonstrates that family is very influential in the way my participants do entrepreneur-ing. The way in which family seem to shape how women do their entrepreneur-ing and gender differ from the ways identified in the literature.

As demonstrated above, entrepreneur-ing is gendered in different ways. One of the ways is the physical involvement of a male figure in entrepreneurial activities. The second way is associating ~~the~~ woman's name with a male relative. The third way is associating one's name with a male political figure, however with the family's supervision, more precisely male relatives.

In the following section, I present the final perceived contextual influence that shaped the doings of entrepreneur-ing and gender.

5.5.4 Religion/culture

This is the third perceived contextual influence that shaped the understanding and the doing of entrepreneurship and gender. I have put the two elements, religion and culture, in one category on the basis of my theoretical underpinning, which treats notions as fluid and socially constructed. The results presented below fall within the lines of culture and religion; they intertwine and overlap and separation is impossible (Smith, 1980; Ahmed, 1992; Bernard, 1994; Essers, 2009).

Theoretically, religion could be considered as a form of doing that embodies culture. Building on the same logic of doing gender, where it embodies the cultural meanings of gender practices, and is not tied to biological sex. Religion could also take shape through cultural practices, rather than religion as simply faith that can be identified without the practises of it's believers. Religion and culture fall under the same logic of multiple social doings. In this regard, I start off with a quote from one of my participants, *"our culture and social traditions all come from the Islamic religion"* **[RM]**.

5.5.4.1 "Being Muslim is the best thing"

This theme sheds light on what my participants think about Islam and being Muslim women entrepreneurs. For example:

> *"the best thing is – thank God – I am Muslim… honestly, being Muslim is the best thing… at least we have a clear constitution… I have a book that I go back to when I need something in business, in psychology… everything is in the book… who else apart from Muslims have a book that they could go back to when needed, a book that is*

mistake-free… you can't trust any book except this one… because we are human, we need a book that we can go back to…" **[BH]**

"... because women in Islam have free will to do anything, Islam didn't say women need to be suffocated, and she can pursue what she wants, and [the right] *not to work…"* **[MH]**

"… I was brought up and educated in a house that values education and religion, my grandfather was a knowledgeable and religious man … so some terms have been engraved in my mind since I was little… such as, work is worshiping… so I feel when I work hard, hard, hard… I have satisfied my God… as if I prayed… these things are engraved in me… I can't work without them" **[RM]**

"look, Islam protects…. It gives you the outline that structures your life… Islam honoured us… I am convinced that if we hold onto Islam in the right way, it will prevent us from so many things… Islam didn't prohibit women from trading, didn't prohibit women from going anywhere, but it did give an outline that will protect her as a woman..." **[ZR]**

As the analysis of the data demonstrates, my participants held very positive views of Islam. Islam in their views gave the prescription and an outline for these women to conduct their lives, businesses and any other issues in life. My women participants also believed that Islam gave rights for women. For example:

"... in the era of prophet Mohamed, Khadija was a trader and she was big, and she had her respect… and the prophet married her while she was a businesswoman… that means we had our rights, we don't need anyone to give us our rights… our rights are clear, we are born with these rights..." **[BH]**

"… Islam is the first thing that encourages you to do business… look back at Sayda Khadija, she was a powerful woman… she was a very well-known businesswoman… the prophet helped her but she is known to be a very smart businesswoman…" **[AK]**

"… Islam from the beginning never stopped women from working in trading, and never was an obstacle to women's work… the evidence is in the history; the prophet's story with Sayda Khadija, he never stopped her even after she became his wife…" **[NS]**

As the above quotes show, these women believed that Islam gives women rights. These women have used the example of Khadija as evidence to prove their claims. As shown, Khadija's example is a positive story in these women's perception. Despite the debates in the literature about the role and impact of Islam, the twenty-nine women in my sample perceived Islam as a positive influence in their lives, and Khadija's story as evidence of Muslim women's position and rights in Islam.

5.5.4.2 "A good woman"

The way women entrepreneurs in my sample chose to dress seems to be shaped by society and the influence of social expectations, which seem to shape how they entrepreneur and do gender. For example:

"… they judge you by the way you dress, you appear, the way you talk, and where you sit [in the meetings], *they don't judge you based on interaction or knowing you… it is by your outfit that they judge if you are a good woman"* **[RM]**

As my analysis demonstrates, the way women entrepreneurs dress makes a difference to how they think they are perceived. For example:

"... I have noticed that when I do a business presentation and I am not wearing Abaya, I get recognition and am valued more"

H. Why? What is your analysis?

"my analysis is that if she doesn't wear Abaya, that means she has reached the point where she can do anything, and we can count on her"

H. What is the impression an Abaya gives? Or doesn't give?

"look, it is not the Abaya, it is the kind of women who wear Abaya, but I think the women who don't wear Abaya are equated with achievements… they are the women who can make their own decisions, by choosing what to wear…"

H. This is the women who don't wear Abaya, what about the women who wear Abaya?

"that she is still comfortable within the social norm and cultural traditions; so if we ask her to come to work at midnight, she wouldn't come"

H. But the one who wears no Abaya would come?

"she will be able to come, she has a strong personality…" **[MA]**

In the Gulf countries, the dress code for women is generally the Abaya, which is a full-length cloak with matching veil, revealing the face and hands (Omair, 2009). According to MA, taking the Abaya off sends some messages and shapes perceptions and social expectations. Although MA spoke about the Abaya, she attended the interview with an Abaya; but it seems she – among other participants – negotiates gender and entrepreneur through choosing how and when to appear in it.

However, taking the Abaya off does not mean taking the headscarf off. Thus it is keeping the headscarf but not wearing the traditional black cloak. To elaborate, Hijab is usually referred to as the Islamic way of covering: meaning, covering all the hair and the body and keeping the face and the hands out, sometimes even the feet. The headscarf refers to the cultural way of covering: meaning, partially covering the hair and showing some parts of hands, arms and feet, but keeping it modest. Locally, it also means wearing colourful outfits and not the black Abaya.

In Oman, keeping the headscarf seems to be important in the Omani context. For example:

> *"… if I take my scarf off in public, I will be perceived as trying to seduce… or I have a hidden agenda that I want to achieve through men… that's why I am still wearing my headscarf…"*

I asked her later in the interview,

> H. Does this affect your business?
>
> *"a lot… it affects it a lot"*
>
> H. How?
>
> *"… they don't trust you…"* **[MH]**

As revealed in the above extract, this participant believed that putting a headscarf on despite one's own belief, affects public perception and expectations. This participant believed that the idea of wearing a headscarf gains people's trust; accordingly, it impacts on women's entrepreneurship.

The pressure on how these women entrepreneurs look seems to be significant. However, wearing a headscarf, or as called by some participants Hijab, seems to have a social significance for gender practices and entrepreneur-ing. For example,

> *"… the pressure here is more on how we look and how we wear our Hijab… but the new generation knows very well that the Hijab is just a social norm… but having it on your head means you are conservative and you are committed…"* **[IZ]**

As this quote indicates, IZ – among some others – believed that it is a social norm and not religious. Some believed it is religious, but some had an interesting view. For example,

"look, Islam protects…. It gives you the outline that structures your life… even the issue of Hijab, you can go uncovered in some places, but you need to be covered in others…." **[ZR]**

As the analysis showed, although women held different personal views on the position of Hijab, most of the participants highlighted that wearing a headscarf is important in Oman and indicates different meanings, such as trust, as shown above, and respect. For example:

"I respect my culture… I respect my family's culture as well… we all wear headscarves and Abaya in the family… " **[EW]**

Despite views held about Hijab, my participants can be divided to three groups: first, the liberal ones; second, the cultural ones; and third, the religious ones. The first group are the ones who did not cover their head, and attended the interviews in a casual outfit, not covering their head. All women from this group are from non-Arab ethnic groups/tribes and from Muscat; all have a Western education.

The second group are mostly from the suburbs of Muscat, or Muscat; they come from Arab tribes, and some other ethnic groups. These women cover their head partially. All are locally educated; some have a higher level of education and others have a moderate level. They came to the interview with their head covered partially.

The third group are mostly from Arab tribes from the interior; and two are from Muscat. Their educational backgrounds differ, but are mostly local. These women wore their headscarf for religious purposes: meaning, the hair is fully covered, and they show only face and hands. I interviewed most of the women in this group at their homes, offices and very few in public spaces, but early in the mornings (except one).

The issue with gaining society's trust was not mentioned in the third, religious group. However, in the first two, the issue that was faced by the third group was mentioned by some; that they felt the government is encouraging the cultural headscarf and not the religious one. Most of them rejected changing how they look and kept their original image. For example:

> *"… so I kept the image of being conservative and modest… I gave that image within my family and society, so everyone says, whatever she does, she does it based on this conservative foundation …"* **[RM]**

In the first group, the liberal one, they all covered their head partially in official public events: meaning, they cover themselves in the cultural way. They expressed feeling that this is the image supported by the government and not their liberal image.

As the analysis demonstrated, the issue of attire for these women entrepreneurs seems to be crucial. The way women choose to appear sends symbolical messages about who they were, and how they wanted to be perceived. Most women negotiated their appearance and clothing according to space and time, and how they wanted to be perceived and treated.

However, my participants held different and contradictory views about whether Hijab is Islamic or cultural. Hence, despite their personal views, the data showed that participants believed wearing a headscarf and appearing with a modest look has an influence on gaining trust, respect and positive social expectations in society and from the government.

Nevertheless, the analysis showed that the participants believed that the government is encouraging the cultural image of modesty, not the Islamic one. The government also seems to discourage the liberal look; this seems to shape how women entrepreneur and negotiate how they appear and dress within society's and the government's expectations.

5.5.4.3 "Written in your fate"

For some of my participants, the notion of fatalism appeared during the interviews in different shapes and forms. My participants' belief in fatalism has shaped to a large extent how they do entrepreneur-ing. For example:

> *"…I felt my fate... is that one day I will run my own company, I had this feeling long back before I started..."* **[BH]**
>
> *"… I don't believe in coincidences… everything is written, God gives us many ropes and watches you, which one you will pick… nothing is by chance… every one you meet… everything happens to you is written in your fate..."* **[IA]**
>
> *"… I had no idea where I was heading… nothing was planned… it was like something was chosen for me and I had no choice in it… it was chosen for me to do business… everything was going smoothly"* **[NH]**

She adds later:

> *"… the project became a business… I believe in God's wisdom… my life changed step by step and transited to a different life… of course God got me into this"* **[NH]**

As the quotes above show, the belief in fatalism seems to shape how these women perceive their entrepreneurship; this simultaneously shaped how they do entrepreneur-ing. For example:

> *"… I don't know what fate holds for me, but I take decisions without knowing if it is going to be good or bad in my fate"* **[SW]**
>
> *"I wrote them a letter stating that I cannot continue with them due to some internal issues with my company… I did not say anything about the problem, I didn't criticise their employee… they have made serious mistakes, and they know what they have done, but I didn't mention it… but the minister rejected my letter and made me come back until we finished the project, they didn't renew it again with me… instead, they*

gave the project to someone else … I said, it is 'khera'… I felt it is 'khera' and it is a 'rezeq' of someone else and God wanted to give it to them… maybe it was a chance from God to them [the client] *to try someone else… and if it was mine, it will come back to me"* **[SW]**

"… I have been approached by more than one client, to be honest, I never thought this was going to happen from one event… at the end, 'tawfeeq' success is from God" **[AR]**

Khera, *rezeq* and *tawfeeq* are three concepts that could be seen as facets of fatalism. Although each has its own dimension, they are usually interlinked together when we speak about them; one leads to the other or they come together in most cases.

Khera is an Islamic expression that means *benevolent*. It is an expression from a general saying *alkheratu fema ekhtarhu allah*; this means, the *good thing/ benevolent is in what God chooses for you*.

It is usually said when someone aims for or wants something but it does not happen, and something else happens instead. The 'thing that happens instead' is perceived as something from God that is in one's favour/benefit, even if it is not realised at that moment. God has prevented one from getting what they want by creating obstacles and challenges from achieving it; and has given something else instead that is better in the long term.

Rezeq is an Islamic belief that is stated directly and overtly in the Quran in verses 22 Surah 'Az-Zariyat', according to the English translation of Quran by Ali (2006). It means *sustenance*. As a Muslim myself, the Islamic interpretation that we have been taught is that God has created all creatures and distributed 'sustenance' for every creature on earth. Therefore, no creature will ever be able to take over what is not theirs. *Rezeq* is perceived in many aspects: mainly, in monetary and tangible attainments. However, some Islamic interpretation extends

this notion by including every blessing in one's life: such as spouse, children, education and so on. Usually, *khera* and *rezeq* come together.

The final notion is *tawfeeq*, which is that blessing and success are from God, which is associated with any achievement one makes or attains. It is stated in the Quran in verse 88 from the Surah 'Hud'. As a Muslim myself, we were taught that this success comes as a second stage; the first stage is one's own preparation and hard work, then the success and the blessing is granted from God.

As the analysis demonstrated, most of my participants mentioned fatalism in different ways during the interviews; very few did not bring it up. I did not ask about fatalism during the interview. In my analysis, I noticed that only two women have revisited their plans, strategies, business models when things went wrong; most did not. However, even those women who revisited brought up fate during the interview.

As the data showed, the belief in fatalism seems to shape how my participants do and negotiate entrepreneur-ing in different ways. The idea of fatalism is rooted in religion and seems to be culturally embedded and socially practised, and most likely it is not gendered.

5.5.5 Summary

In this second part of the results chapter, I have captured the perceived key contextual influences that seem to shape the doings of entrepreneur-ing. The first perceived key contextual influence is tribalism. Tribalism has not been recognised in the women's entrepreneurship literature, nor in the limited literature on Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Gulf states. As the analysis of the data suggests, tribalism seems to overshadow gender, qualifications and business sector. Tribalism seems to determine who

can or cannot become an entrepreneur, and seems to shape social expectations of women's entrepreneurship. Thus, tribalism seems to open new opportunities and possibilities for entrepreneurship, but also constrains in some cases. Most women in my sample have capitalised on the tribalism card and entrepreneur-ed within it; the rest were aware of and acknowledged tribalism's impact.

Government is identified as the second perceived key contextual influence that shapes the doing of entrepreneur-ing. As the analysis demonstrated, the government's support for women seems to be a result of HM's support for women. Accordingly, women believed that they are supported and there is publicity to show HM that Omani women are recognised and supported.

The support offered to women entrepreneurs seems to take a parent–child relationship. Some of the participants felt that the government is patronising them and treats them like children; accordingly, the government is selective of who to support more at certain stages. As one of the participants suggested, the government is setting up the Omani woman's role model and therefore favouritism is practised by the government.

Also, the data suggest that establishing and maintaining a relationship with the government is crucial. As highlighted by my participants, the government seems to play a mediator role to create opportunities through facilitating deals and potential clients. The government also seems to ease the bureaucracy in the procedures for the ones who are government allies.

The final point under the governmental practices is ideas. As the data suggest, women believed that new ideas in Oman face some resistance from the government. The government seems to encourage women entrepreneurs in conventional business ideas, or ideas that

embody national identity spirit. In this regard, professional women expressed that the government does not understand their ideas and therefore their ideas take time to proceed with the government entities.

The third perceived key contextual influence that seems to shape the doing of entrepreneurship is family. Although family has been identified in the mainstream literature, and recent critical studies, the ways in which family influences and shapes Omani women entrepreneurs' experiences differs from that identified in the literature on women's entrepreneurship and Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship. As the data suggest, the family's involvement, especially the male members of the family, is important. As shown, the physical appearance of a male relative figure with a women entrepreneur is an important cultural/gendered practice. This practice embodies the idea that women should not perceived to be alone, especially when dealing with the opposite sex.

Also, the family is involved with women's entrepreneur-ing through being introduced to the mentor or colleagues at the business. It seems the presence of the family in a woman's business grants her social trust, and also protects her.

The second point under family is how women entrepreneur internally with employees. As the results showed, women entrepreneurs play the role of mother with their Omani male employees. In this regard, women employ younger Omani male employees and are introduced to their families. Based on the cases presented above, it seems that mothering is socially accepted or perhaps expected.

The fourth perceived key contextual influence that seems to shape the doings is religion/culture. As the analysis of the data demonstrated, women entrepreneurs believed

that Islam has a positive influence on their lives. They have used the example of Khadija as evidence of women's rights in Islam and in entrepreneurship.

The second aspect of religion/culture is women's attire. As shown above, the way in which women chose to appear shapes social expectations and impacts women's entrepreneurship. Although my participants held different views about whether Hijab is Islamic or cultural, women demonstrated that society and the government seem to support the modest cultural image of Omani women. On the social level, the modest cultural image seems to make these women trustworthy and respectable. On the governmental level, it aligns with the Omani women's image that the government is promoting.

The final point under religion/culture category is fatalism. The notion of fatalism stands in contrast to what has been identified in the Western mainstream literature. As the analysis showed, the notion of fatalism featured during the interviews in many different ways. The underlying thought of fatalism has shaped how women do entrepreneur-ing in a way that differed from what is proposed in the literature. As shown, the impression one gets is that fate has made these women entrepreneurs.

With this in mind, I turn to the discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the results and commentary reported in the previous chapter, in light of the literature and with the research questions and research aim and objectives in mind. This research has set out to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do Omani women conceptualise entrepreneurship?
2. How do Omani women narrativise their entrepreneurial practices and what do these narratives suggest about the ways they understand and make sense of the context in which they work?

To answer the research questions, the empirical study was conducted with these three set objectives:

1. To identify the meanings/associations that Omani women ascribe to the notion of entrepreneurship,
2. To identify the perceived key contextual influences that shape the practices of entrepreneurship,
3. To contribute to the body of knowledge of women's entrepreneurship conceptualisation in theory, research and practice.

This section discusses the two main aspects highlighted in the questions through the lenses of the empirical data gathered and the literature reviewed.

6.2 Part One: Conceptualising entrepreneurship

This category explored the meanings my participants held of what entrepreneurship means to them and how they think entrepreneurship is perceived in Oman.

As the data demonstrated, most women's entrepreneurship grew out of a hobby or an interest; only three associated entrepreneurship with monetary outcome. Almost all women except three had another source of income and came from financially stable backgrounds. Despite their educational level, none of the participants were job-seekers. Interestingly, the hobby-related motive was reported by a qualitative study on Omani women doing business a decade ago (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003), although the term was 'businesswomen' and PASMED was not established yet (not even the SME department, as it started in 2007 (Al Barwani et al., 2014)). This indicates that women in Oman have mainly been hobby-driven in starting up a business since the last decade.

The assumption I am drawing on here is that women's entrepreneurship is most likely perceived as additional income or something extra in one's free time. The idea that women's income or job is perceived as an 'extra' or additional income rather than essential has been highlighted in some earlier studies in Oman and the Gulf states (e.g. Al-Bulushi, 2010; Erogul, 2011), where financial responsibility is the gender role of men in Arab and Muslim families, while women's main responsibility is domestic (Metcalfe, 2008). Also, the literature reported that women entrepreneurs from the wealthier Gulf countries are not motivated by financial rewards, but rather by other personal reasons (Itani et al., 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014) unlike women from other Arab countries who are driven by economic necessity (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Hattab, 2012). According to Hijab (1988), the history and economic conditions in different Arab countries created reasons for women to join the labour

market, where economic necessity is the main driving force in most Arab countries, but women in Gulf countries did not need to work unless they wanted to.

Therefore, and in the entrepreneurship context, some scholars suggest that women's entrepreneurship in the Gulf states is not taken seriously by society, as woman's job is perceived as voluntary (Erogul, 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012). In addition, entrepreneurship is not perceived as a real job in Oman, more of a side job (Al-Mattani, 2017). Thus, one can draw the assumption that women's entrepreneurship in Oman is rather voluntary, extra income, and perhaps a luxury.

My Omani women's motives supported the point addressed in the current studies on Arab women entrepreneurs. As the data showed, it appears that most women who chose entrepreneurship in this study come from rather financially stable backgrounds and rely on another source of income. Mostly had respected jobs and left by choice. The ones who did not have previous jobs were also not job-seekers; they were retired, or housewives to an established husband. Meaning, they voluntarily participated in entrepreneurship and mostly treated it as extra income.

The initial aim for HM's call and for establishing the entrepreneurship authority PASMED is to reduce youth unemployment. Interestingly, none of my 29 participants were job-seekers and their age ranged between twenty-two and fifty-five years old. Although my sample may not be representative, it could be treated as indicative of the following: first, of the type of women who are attracted to become entrepreneurs in Oman; second, of the type of women whom the Omani system attracts; third, how entrepreneurship is perceived (not a real job, extra income and voluntary), which is the focus of my study. However, these women are considered

some of the first group of official Omani women entrepreneurs. Thus, one can speculate whether the government is reaching out to the targeted segment; and whether they are attracting the unemployed youth. It appears the segment becoming women entrepreneurs is most likely not the intended one that HM set out the authority for, which warrants further exploration of why and who is attracted to become an entrepreneur in Oman.

One of the first aspects that seem to have become associated with the notion of entrepreneurship is the idea of governmental support. Seemingly, the role of the government in initiating and introducing entrepreneurship programmes has shaped to a large extent what entrepreneurship is becoming about (Ennis, 2015). Government support and intervention in shaping and regulating entrepreneurship and the SME sector has most likely developed the idea that an entrepreneur is someone who is in need of support.

The perceived government's strong role could be explained in light of the 'rentier state' system literature that has been discussed in the context chapter. To recap, the government under the rentier state system offers different social contracts every now and then to their citizens in order to sustain full loyalty. These social contracts are free services in different aspects of individuals' lives. Traditionally, employment is perceived as a social contract (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). More recently, Ennis (2013) suggests that entrepreneurship in Oman is another form of social contract, which evolves around free services and support. One of the implications of treating entrepreneurship as a social contract is that it presumes dependency on the government in becoming an entrepreneur. Also, it presumes that an entrepreneur cannot thrive without the government's patronage. Thus, one can assume that the way to become an entrepreneur in Oman is through the government, and the governmental support. Given that the official category of entrepreneur was

introduced in Oman through the government in 2013 and it is only for locals, registering as an entrepreneur entitles one to government support, and probably consenting to this social contract.

However, my participants regarded women doing business as a traditional practice and not new. The newness is perceived in the term not the activity. As the data showed, the home-business activity of traditional women's business is becoming equivalent to what women's entrepreneurship stands for in Oman. The government's focus on (invisible) women in home traditional business is reinforcing and enhancing the idea that entrepreneurship is equivalent to home-business, which in turn leaves limited or no room for business in professions or new perspectives in entrepreneurship on one hand, and explains the social acceptance for women's entrepreneurship.

In contrast, the notion of 'working women' with wage employment, which is also reported to be a new notion in the Gulf countries, is the one with challenges (Itani et al., 2011; Sidani, 2016). The issue of women leaving their traditional private spaces has been addressed as one of the main challenges of contemporary lives in Gulf societies (El-Haddad, 2003; Naguib and Jamali, 2015). For example, studies reported negative attitudes towards working women in Gulf countries (Zeidan and Bahrami, 2011), while the case seems to be different with entrepreneurship. Families in the UAE prefer their daughters to become entrepreneurs rather than working in employment (Madichie and Gallant, 2012) and Emirati women entrepreneurs are satisfied with their entrepreneurial experience (Itani et al., 2011). In Saudi Arabia also, entrepreneurship is perceived as a positive occupation for women (Danish and Smith, 2012) which raises the questions of why and how people perceive the notion of women's entrepreneurship.

Building on the assumption that entrepreneurship in terms of activity is perceived to be equivalent to traditional home-business, this implies that it is also so in traditional women's business sectors. Thus, entrepreneurship is not perceived as a profession nor as a professional business. On the contrary, it is hobby-related and is domestic women's traditional business. Thus, it appears that women's entrepreneurship is perceived within these two domains, home-business and hobby-related, and most likely leaving no room for women with a profession to become entrepreneurs in Oman. In essence, women's entrepreneurship in Oman seems to reinforce traditional domesticated women's business rather than challenging it.

In addition, it seems also the media is concentrating on certain women in certain sectors, which also seems to play a role in perpetuating the limited and the traditional stereotype for and of Omani women entrepreneurs. According to some participants, this in turn has restricted the options and the chances for professional women entrepreneurs in the Omani market.

Also, one of the underpinning ideas that could have reinforced traditional home-business is the usage of Khadija's example. The example of Khadija is the story that is set for Muslim women to prove women's rights in Islam, specifically the right to work (Ullah et al., 2015), which might also have set the example for the 'kind' of job preferable for Muslim women. Based on my observation, Khadija's traditional trading has been reframed as entrepreneurship in modern public discourse. The understanding of Khadija's story has probably played a role in shaping how entrepreneurship is perceived. However, how Khadija was doing business appears not to be discussed or known. As Muslim-born myself, the 'hows' of Khadija's trading are neither known nor discussed: for example, the public space that

Khadija was trading in or the mixing with the opposite sex, nor presumably also, what kind of trading business she had, nor the sort(s) of goods she traded in. Thus, it seems that the example of Khadija is used to justify and legitimise two standpoints: first, the rights of women to work in Islam; and second, that women's business is legitimate and acceptable in Islam, and perhaps preferable for Muslim women.

Building on the idea of reframing Khadija's trading into entrepreneurship most certainly made the idea of women doing business religiously legitimate, historically practised, and socially and culturally accepted, and maybe preferred. In other words, entrepreneurship has been linked to Islam through the example of Khadija. With the association of Khadija with entrepreneurship, it appears as if entrepreneurship has been Islamicised in public discourse. This thought might have made entrepreneurship a positive and appealing job for Muslim women in a conservative religious society. The issue of framing Western concepts within Islamic frames has been practised in the modernist discourse in the history of Arab nations, as a tool for legitimacy in the modern Arab Muslim world (Hatem, 1993).

Thus, I argue that because Khadija's example is reframed in entrepreneurship, this has played a role – to large extent – in limiting entrepreneurship to the traditional trading notion, leaving no or little room for new perspectives for entrepreneurship.

Also, because the interviews were conducted in Arabic, Khadija was described as a 'trader', which might be a colloquial expression in the Arabic language; but even so, associating Khadija with trading and business, and entrepreneurship more recently, gives the impression that entrepreneurship is not perceived differently from traditional business activity, which is accepted historically, religiously, socially and culturally.

One of issues that might be behind the confusion and the overlapping of the phrases business, trading and entrepreneurship is the issue of language. The literature on entrepreneurship in non-Western contexts has neglected language and translation issues. For example, according to Alecchi and Radovic-Markovic (2013), there are three versions of the word entrepreneurship in Spanish, and each version has different connotations. Seemingly, the word entrepreneurship has been translated into Arabic fairly recently, but I could not find enough resources to trace the translation. However, the Arabic version is used in official documents in Oman, and elsewhere in the Arab world. Due to lack of resources, I rely on my results and my knowledge as an Arab, and on a PhD thesis that acknowledged this point but did not discusses it further (Ennis, 2013).

As shown in the results chapter, the Arabic version of the word created a certain connotation. One of the most significant implications of the Arabic version is the notion 'pioneer/to lead', which focusses attention to the leading aspect that is becoming associated with entrepreneurship. Based on social constructionist epistemology, the role of language is reflecting our reality and constructing it (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009). This has been evidenced in how my participants perceived entrepreneurship, especially the ones who are only exposed to the Arabic version.

Given the newness of the notion in the Arab world (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015), the analysis of my results demonstrated that my participants are still confused about what entrepreneurship is and how it might differ from traditional trading and business. The views expressed by my participants were rather confused, contradictory and overlapping; this reinforces the idea that the notion of entrepreneurship is still evolving and developing. The results of my analysis also support the idea the entrepreneurship is a fluid and changing

concept that takes different shapes and forms in a given time and space, and is constructed by its context (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006; Steyaert, 2007).

In addition to the language aspect, the analysis of my data in the previous chapter showed that women participants in my study perceived entrepreneurship as gender-neutral. However, the language they used is gendered. The male pronoun is the dominant norm in the spoken language of my participants as evidenced in the quotes presented in the previous chapter. The turn to language and the gendered nature of language is raised by contemporary scholars in social constructionism, post-structuralism and critical feminist theories (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009). Similar to the mainstream Western literature, the norm in Arabic language seems to be gendered language with a male dominant pronoun. Also, as discussed further below in the second section of this chapter, the doing of entrepreneuring is actually gendered, despite how my participants perceive it.

However, unlike the Western literature in describing occupations with gender-characteristic traits (e.g. Acker, 1990), sex-segregated societies offer women a whole range of different possibilities. Women in these societies are expected to work in almost everything. The criteria of what is appropriate to women in Oman are not described in terms of gender-characteristic traits, but in terms of sex-segregation and physical activity (Al-Bulushi, 2010).

To elaborate on this claim, Omani society is sex-segregated historically and culturally; and the social tendency towards sex-segregation remains in place (Al-Bulushi, 2010; Al-Azri, 2013). Current governments emerged in societies that were already sex-segregated, and some have since enforced sex-mixing in the work place, such as Oman, except in the educational system in Oman that started as and remains relatively sex-segregated. This has resulted in strict

gendered cultural and social codes practised in mixed workplaces (Chatty, 2000; Al-Azri, 2013). Also, this has created a gender-distinct administrative system, which means separated offices and spaces for women in organisations (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). Ironically, this condition is considered as mixed space as long as it is in the same building.

Against this background, I argue that any job or occupation that requires a high level of mixing with non-related opposite sex persons is most likely perceived as unsuitable for women (Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Al-Bulushi, 2010).

Under this logic, every occupation requires women. In other words, having women in every occupation that will deal with and serve women is expected. For, example, we need female doctors to deal with female clients, and female cashiers, female waiters, female drivers, female police officers, and others. And, for example, we have a separate section for women in the Royal Omani Police, where only women police officers work in these sections and offer services to women only; the same logic applies for men.

In this regard, entrepreneurship might become more appealing in sex-segregated societies. It might be because there will always be a demand for women-only services on one hand, and on the other hand, women will have the choice in setting the boundaries in interacting with the opposite sex. Interestingly, this supports and extends the work of Essers's (2009) in critical entrepreneurship studies, in whose work some of the Muslim migrant women in the Netherlands also set the boundaries in interacting with the opposite sex, and capitalised on offering services for women only, which could be seen as an opportunity.

However, unlike Omani women, some women in Essers's sample described and perceived entrepreneurship in terms of gendered character traits; this might imply the influence of the Dutch context on these women. So in Oman it is most likely that the deep-rooted sex-segregated mind-set, societies and mentality have created the idea of gender-less occupations, and created a different standard of occupation appropriateness.

In this section, I have discussed the meanings that are associated with the notion of women's entrepreneurship in Oman according to women who are currently involved in the act of entrepreneur-ing. In the next section, I turn to discuss the perceived key contextual influences that shaped the doings of entrepreneur-ing.

6.3 Part Two: Perceived contextual influences on doing entrepreneur-ing

This category captured the perceived contextual influences that shaped the doings of entrepreneur-ing. As the previous chapter set out, the main perceived key contextual influences are tribalism, government, family and religion/culture. Most of these perceived key contextual influences that are identified in this thesis have not been identified in the mainstream Western literature, nor in the critical entrepreneurship studies on women's entrepreneurship, such as tribalism. Some have been recognised but in different ways, such as family; and some are in contrast to what has been identified in the existing Western literature, such as the sections under religion/culture; also some issues have been recognised in the critical entrepreneurship studies on Muslim women such as attire, but the ways they play out are different. The following sections discuss the perceived key contextual influences in the light of the empirical data gathered and the literature reviewed.

The first perceived key contextual influence is tribalism. The importance of tribalism in Oman has been introduced in the context chapter, where some studies showed based on observation that the labour market in Oman is divided based on tribes and ethnic groups/tribes (Valeri, 2007; Al-Azri, 2013). However, none of the studies has addressed the issue of tribalism on women's condition in entrepreneurship as yet; however, it has been acknowledged for women in management in some Gulf countries (Omair, 2008).

In our daily lives as Omanis, the issue of tribes is rarely spoken of negatively in public discussions, but tribal-based practices are noticeable and observable in different forms of life in Oman (Al-Rawas, 2008).

As the analysis of my data demonstrated, my women participants felt that their tribal name is the first entry point to entrepreneurship. The tribal reputation, especially in business, played a role in drawing the social expectation of who can or cannot became an entrepreneur. Also, the tribal name also played a role in developing and capitalising on the tribal network and relationships. As the data showed, my women participants negotiated their entrepreneur-ing within the tribal name they carry. Seemingly, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, tribalism overshadows gender, qualification and any other sorts of categories that may have an influence on entrepreneurship.

Thus, the tribal name seems to be the first entry point for women's entrepreneurship in Oman; it creates possibilities and opportunities. Gender is constructed within the tribal affiliation. Theoretically, the significance of each social doing depends on the tribe's structural arrangement and circumstances (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). In Oman's tribal structure,

the tribal identity is a social doing that positions women in the labour market, which in turn creates her opportunities and chances, and the constraints women might face.

The second perceived contextual influence is the government. As the analysis of the data showed, governmental practices played a strong role as key contextual influences that shaped how the 29 women entrepreneurs do entrepreneur-ing. As reported in the results chapter, the participants of my study felt that women entrepreneurs received recognition and strong publicity. The main reason behind this in their view is because of HM's interest and historical personal support for women, and more recently, entrepreneurship.

The idea of pleasing the father could be interpreted in light of the tribalism mentality and social structure that I have mentioned in the context chapter, under 'paternalistic leadership'. To recap, the power structure in the tribes is determined by members' position in the nexus of family, friends and allies. Thus, members are in a constant state of seeking the tribal leader's attention for favours and other benefits (Neal et al., 2007). Building on this, one could speculate that women's entrepreneurship might be used as a tool to get HM's attention or maybe to prove to HM that his call is listened to and followed. This assumption was shared by some participants, where they believed that this attention is given to women in Oman because of HM's interest; this implies that women's condition in Oman might have been different if it was not for HM.

Expanding on the father figure of HM (Valeri, 2015), and drawing on the father's power and position in the patriarchal family in Arab Gulf societies (Barakat, 1985; El-Haddad, 2003) such as the father/familial obedience that Omani society highly appreciates and practises (Al-Bulushi, 2010) and the guardianship mentality that remains culturally and socially practised,

where the father's permission is sought after and respected (Al-Talei, 2010) even if it is not enforced by the law (Al-Riyami, et al., 2002; Madichie & Gallant, 2012), and that career choice is not a personal decision for women, but rather of her father (Al-Bulushi, 2010) despite her educational attainments and financial independency (El-Haddad, 2003) and that women will not object to father's choices in her career decisions (Tlaiss, 2014).

Thus, the father metaphor used to describe the leadership implies the power structure of the leadership and women's position in this structure in the Omani society. Having said that, I suggest that Omani women's condition is highly politicised and relies heavily on the leadership figure.

Interestingly, Omani women's acceptance of the leadership's decisions is reported elsewhere (Neal et al., 2007). Neal et al. (2007) pointed out that despite the educational level of Omani women, they preferred the traditional paternalistic leadership style. Omani women's acceptance might be explained in the light of the father's position in the family hierarchy in the Arab social structure (Barakat, 1985; El-Haddad, 2003). In addition, the model of 'given' rights under the paternalistic leadership style reinforces the power structure of the patriarchal family social structure, social order and power relations.

On a larger scale, the patriarchal family structure is echoed in the patriarchal government practices (Al-Rasheed, 2013), where the leadership and the government decide what is right for women, as women are treated like children (Chatty, 2000).

Thus, the father figure of HM seems to play a strong role in the lives of the women entrepreneurs included in this study. As demonstrated in the results chapter, two implication

of the father's influence in my study were: first, initiating change for women's conditions; and second, forming and practising the 'National Identity'.

As the results demonstrated, changes taking place in Omani society are mainly driven by the leadership. It is a top-down model. Although some (two) women had critical views on the reactive character of Omani society to the leadership, these views can be considered as acknowledgement and emphasis that change is coming from the top.

Situating this idea of the top-down change model within the logic of social redoing, where West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) and West and Fenstermaker (1995) proposed that redoing gender and other social doings is usually exhibited by individuals who change the normative behaviour; however acceptance must be granted by the social group in order for the change to take place (Hirst and Schwabenland, 2017). Counter-intuitively, it appears that the leadership in Oman is the source of change, and this form of change is granted social acceptance in the light of tribalism and the paternalistic style of the patriarchal leadership. The father, tribalism and paternalistic style of leadership seem to form the effective mode for change, as can be seen in the case of Omani women in general as shown in the context chapter. Women in my study were aware of this condition, accepted it and negotiated within it. Their reaction is taking the opportunity of the options that has become available to them, under the name of the father. Even the ones who held some critical views of this form of change, as their quotes showed, have seized this opportunity, capitalised on it and negotiated their entrepreneur-ing and gender within it.

This form of change can be observed in the Gulf states; for example, the permission for women to drive in Saudi Arabia, which took place during writing this thesis. The permission

was granted to women under the name of the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, despite the historical and earlier attempts of Saudi women activists, who were mostly jailed for advocating the right to drive; and society has accepted it. Although this assumption is based on observation and might be an anecdote, especially under the Arab authoritarian regimes that restrict rights for freedom of speech and expression (Valeri, 2015), it is worth mentioning and taking it into consideration when tackling the issue of women and leadership within this political system in the Gulf states.

The second impact of the leadership on some (seven) women entrepreneurs is in integrating the idea of national identity in the business. Al-Azri (2013) highlighted that the 'Omani National Identity' is promoted as a cohabitation of Omani traditional heritage and modernity. Hence, Valeri (2015) pointed out that the 'Omani National Identify' revolves around the persona of HM. Interestingly, these seven women have identified their business within the nationalism line; more precisely, they associated their business with HM.

Hence, women with a national symbol business perceived themselves as creative. They also emphasised and practised their national identity through their business. In this regard, I see them doing their national identity through entrepreneur-ing; and perhaps doing gender as a dutiful daughter by symbolising HM through their business.

Moreover, it seems that the businesses which symbolised HM are more supported and encouraged by the government and perhaps also by society. Women entrepreneurs who had a national-identity-free business reported struggling with the government to get their ideas through. The assumption that the national symbol businesses are more supported could fall

under the government's efforts of promoting 'The National Identity' or could be a result of it (Al-Azri, 2013).

This line of business seems to be encouraged by the government to enhance symbolically the modern Omani identity, which might also be welcomed by society. In this regard, one could suggest that entrepreneurship in Oman might be another facet of reinforcing the 'Omani National Identity'.

Within this parent–children model of the Omani leadership and government with women entrepreneurs in my study, all participants placed an emphasis on the importance of the relationship with the government.

The strong role played by the government in regulating, supervising and controlling the market seems to force women entrepreneurs to become allies with the government in order to succeed in the market. It seems that the government is forcing companies and organisations to contract Omani entrepreneurs. Although this act is not explicitly announced, it seems that it is practised. This act could be explained in the same logic of Omanisation (quota system) introduced in the context chapter. Under this logic, organisations and companies might need to or be forced by the government to contract Omani entrepreneurs, which might be returned in terms of favours in other projects, or part of an agreement. In Oman, it is said that contracts and tenders are relationship-based. Some participants emphasised relationships in Oman play a stronger role than qualifications. Oman relies heavily on relationships, which shape the labour market and business deals on the national, personal and business levels (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

The importance of relationships in business deals, entrepreneurship and employment in Arab countries has been addressed previously in the limited existing literature (e.g. Al-Riyami et al., 2002; Erogul, 2011; Sidani and Thornberry, 2012); this seems to be deeply embedded in society and reflected in government practices, as can be observed in the case of women's entrepreneurship in my study.

The government's patronage could be explained in the light of the rentier mentality, which enhances dependency behaviour as discussed under the first category. Thus, in the entrepreneurship context, the chances that entrepreneurs succeed without government support are probably slim to none. Although government patronage is framed as support, help and protection for locals, it enhances the dependency behaviour of nationals. Also, considering entrepreneurship as a form of social contract enhances the idea that entrepreneurship in Oman revolves around support, as pointed out in the first category.

In this regard, due to the role of the government, entrepreneurship in Oman might come across as: 1) about free support and services; 2) reproducing and increasing dependency behaviour; and most importantly, 3) a social contract to maintain loyalty among nationals. The implication of these claims is that the government is not achieving the aim that entrepreneurship is set out for, and the main problem of unemployment will most certainly remain in place, and perhaps create new issues.

The third perceived key contextual influence is the role of family. The role of family in Omani women's entrepreneurship differs from the role family plays in Western mainstream literature and critical entrepreneurship studies. As the data analysis demonstrated, women entrepreneurs cannot be perceived as alone and without the support of male figures in the

family. Interestingly, this claim has been reported in the study about Omani women doing business a decade ago (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). This study demonstrated that Omani women put their male relative in the foreground of their business to overcome gender discrimination through cultural practices. In the case of my study, women entrepreneurs had to involve their male relatives' presence in doing entrepreneuring; this seems similar in principle but perhaps a little different in practice. Most of the women in my study appeared with a male relative, except some from the interior who made their male relative the face of the business. As can be seen, the situation is changing: most women decided to appear publicly, perhaps because of government encouragement, however accompanied by their male relative, or their shadow. Within the redoing of gender, the change that is occurring here most likely is a reaction rather than initiating anything. In other words, when the government is protecting, supporting and encouraging, Omani women and families are coming out publicly. However, it appears more of stretching within the social boundaries, which seems to be socially acceptable. But it also could be that because women's entrepreneurship was not given attention before HM's recent calls, women, after the attention given, need to put a male relative in the foreground to cope as an entrepreneur in a patriarchal society.

It seems that all the cultural practices perpetuate the women's need for a man, or his shadow, for women to step into entrepreneurship. Interestingly, the involvement of men in women's entrepreneurship in Gulf societies is reported elsewhere. Similarly, in the UAE, the involvement of a male figure is a source of legitimacy for women's entrepreneurship (Erogul, 2011). In Saudi Arabia, it is a legal requirement (Welsh et al., 2014). The essence of men's existence in women's entrepreneurship remains in place.

Although in Oman a guardian's permission is not a legal requirement for work after the age of 18, most Omani women entrepreneurs are doing gender and doing entrepreneur-ing by maintaining or seeking a shadow male figure, more specifically, in the case of working in a sector that requires mixing with the opposite sex, and in the case of public appearances. It seems that it is the role of the male members of the family to get involved, while it seems that it is expected of women to involve male relatives. The need of a male shadow appears to be the norm, and women are aware of this and negotiate their entrepreneur-ing and gender within it.

Comparing this condition against women migrants in Essers's (2009) case; one can observe the different cultural practices of guardianship, father and male relative role, and involvement in women's entrepreneurship. While migrant women have discussed issues of father domination, individuality and issues of similar sorts, women in my sample did not raise these issues. That women in my sample come from rather stable, financially capable, are perhaps privileged and have good relationships with their father, implies that women who might face challenges with their father most likely will seek alternative career options (Tlaiss, 2014). Also, issues of agency and individuality might be ideas that are spread in the Western discourse rather than in a conservative Islamic society like Oman. Seemingly, the concerns in Oman seem to be related to confirm social and reaffirmation of gender norms rather than challenging them. Thus, the involvement of a male figure relative is historically practised in Muslim societies, but takes different shapes.

Also, the involvement of a political leader in supporting women entrepreneurs publicly seems to be normal and acceptable, perhaps even expected. However, the political leader's support takes place in relation to and with direct involvement of the family. Interestingly, the study

about Omani women doing business that was conducted a decade ago pointed out that professional relationships in Oman are rather personal, and vice versa; this is due to the extensive informal relationships that tie and link Omani society (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). However, the involvement of the family in what seems to be a professional relationship implies that women will always need a shadow publicly, and a male relative's support in internal and external issues of women's entrepreneurship, despite that this form of business–family involvement is not considered a family business in the Omani context. Also, the male political leader's involvement perpetuates the idea that women are perceived as minors and children in the public domain.

Internally, women entrepreneurs seem to act in a mothering leadership/management style in running their business. This implies two points: first, the centrality of the family in Omanis' life, which seems to play as a point of reference for women's experience. Meaning, women evaluate and judge their experience in entrepreneurship based on their experience in the family. As can be seen, family relations are echoed in the work environment and professional relations. Second, it seems that the only position that women are accepted in for being on top and senior in a patriarchal society is when women are mothers, according to the family structure. Therefore, women entrepreneurs act like mothers in their entrepreneur-ing, which appears to be legitimate, socially accepted, and perhaps expected.

The 'mothering' leadership style might represent the 'appropriate' mode of conduct for women between sexes in a workplace. Meaning, gender relations are framed within family metaphors in order to legitimise these new relationships in an originally sex-segregated context, where initially, mixing takes place on the basis of necessity (e.g. Itani et al., 2011; Madichie and Gallant, 2012). However, all the previous studies have addressed the issue of

interacting with male clients or external relations (e.g. Al-Riyami et al., 2002), but little attention has been paid to women entrepreneurs' relations internal to the business with male employees.

As can be seen, all the gender relations presented in this study are formulated within family metaphors, starting from the leader as the 'father', and women as the 'children' or 'adopted', and ending up with the employees as the 'sons'. In other words, family metaphors seem to give legitimacy to gender relations in a culture that does not approve of other relations outside familial ties (Madichie and Gallant, 2012). Hence, these familial/professional relationships are practised within the involvement of the families, which seems to be necessary for gaining trust and protection, and perhaps legitimacy, which also enhances the premise that the 'self' in the Arab societies only exists within the 'we' (Sidani and Thornberry, 2012), and reproduces the centrality of the family within Arab societies (Barakat, 1985; Hijab, 1988; El-Haddad, 2003). That seems to play as a frame of reference for one's experiences in entrepreneurship, and perhaps in life.

Gender relations and practises in each Muslim society are taking different forms, such as the example of Essers's sample (2009) and my study; while family metaphors have played a strong role in shaping and explaining how professional relationships are taking shape and are practised in entrepreneurship in Oman; the Muslim migrant women in Essers's (2009) sample formulated gender relations according to their personal interpretation of Islam. Their point of reference was their Islamic knowledge; while in my study, the point of reference is family centrality in the Omani culture. These cultural, situational and structural differences have played a role in how women in each Muslim society framed and practised gender relations.

The debate that sex- segregation/mixing is cultural rather than Islamic is an on-going debate between scholars in Muslim societies (e.g. Dechant and AL Lamky, 2005); however, as demonstrated, it remains an issue in the Muslim societies. Nevertheless, it is understood and practised differently among Muslim societies. While some societies re-interpreted sex-segregation/mixing within an Islamic lens, such as Muslims in the Netherlands, other societies, such as Oman, re-interpreted it within a cultural lens.

The religion/cultural debate takes me to the fourth perceived key contextual influence that shaped the doing of entrepreneurship, which is religion/culture. As mentioned in the literature review, most of the early studies on Muslim communities have treated each as a variable and a fixed concept: Islam and culture are separated and considered two different entities; this seems to be problematic theoretically. The social constructionist perspective has overcome this theoretical limitation, by treating such notions as social doing. Islamic affiliation has been treated as a social doing (e.g. Essers, 2009; Essers et al., 2010) so has culture (Carter and Bolden, 2012). As mentioned in the results chapter, I have considered religion as a form of doing that embodies cultural meanings of religion. Therefore, both are inseparable.

In Western and post-colonial literature, Islam is discussed as suppressing and oppressing women; however, most of the studies lack Muslim women's own perspective about the role and impact of Islam on their lives, e.g. Ahmed (1992, 2011). Also, most of the Western studies on Muslim women are based on the experience of Western women, which is projected on Muslim women, rather than bringing Muslim women's experience as they live it, express it, interpret it and making sense of it (Saliba, 2000; Golley, 2004).

Interestingly, none of the women in my study have expressed any negative views of Islam. This assumption aligned with most of the existing studies on Muslim women, which have pointed out that Muslim women did not feel oppressed because of Islam, e.g. Tlaiss (2015). On the contrary, Islam was viewed as having a positive impact in their lives. They shared the belief that Islam worked as a foundation that granted them an outline within which to conduct their lives. Also, they shared the belief that their rights as women are acknowledged and addressed in Islam. In this regard, these women used the example of Khadija as evidence to prove their claims.

The example of Khadija came up in the context of women's rights in Islam during the course of my interviews, as evidence for women's rights in Islam. The example of Khadija is widely used but is the only example used to prove women's rights in Islam (Ullah et al., 2015). Although Ahmed (1992) argues among other Arab feminists that Khadija's example represents the pre-Islamic period rather than women's condition in Islam, Khadija has been promoted as representing women's rights in Islam (Ullah et al., 2015). The women in my study used Khadija's example as evidence for women's rights in Islam.

The usage of Khadija's example among my participants supports the idea that Khadija's example is the widely used example in the Islamic world as evidence for women's rights in Islam (Hijab, 1988; Ullah et al., 2015). The example of Khadija was not challenged or questioned among my participants. The idea that Khadija might be representing a pre-Islamic phase as argued by Ahmed (1992) was not mentioned among my sample. On the contrary, Khadija's example was used as evidence for women's rights in Islam in general, and regarding work and entrepreneurship in specific (Ullah et al., 2015). Khadija's narrative is used as a

source for legitimacy in entrepreneurship for Muslim migrant women in Essers (2009) sample, and for Muslim women entrepreneurs elsewhere, e.g. Essers et al. (2010) and Tlaiss (2015).

However, one of the issues that seems to predominate in Muslim women's lives as entrepreneur is their attire. Muslim women's attire is the most significant religious identification (Essers, 2009). It is considered as a challenge in the contemporary lives of Arab Muslims (Sidani, 2016), and to all Muslim women (Omair, 2009).

To lay out the background on the issues of public conduct and attire, Arab women's movement was restricted to the private space of homes (Sidani, 2016). In public spaces, Arab women are usually veiled in most Arab countries. The veiling format differs from one country to another. In the Gulf countries, generally it is Abaya, which is a full-length cloak with matching veil, revealing the face and hands, while some areas within these countries wear Niqab, which covers most of the face, leaving only the eyes uncovered; or Burqa, which covers the face completely (Omair, 2009).

The veiling of Muslim women has occupied much of the post-colonialist, feminist, Arab feminist, Muslim feminist, history and political science discourses (e.g. Mernissi, 1991; Odeh, 1993; Saliba, 2000; Ahmed, 2014). Veiling is and remains a heated debate in the global discourse nowadays, with increasing tension between Islamist activists and the West . Veiling is the most visible marker for Muslim women and Muslim identity (Ahmed, 1992, 2011).

In Western and post-colonial studies, veiling seems to signify the oppression and degradation of Muslim women in Muslim societies; also it is depicted as sign of the backwardness of Islamic societies (e.g. Ahmed, 1992, 2011). Within the Arab world, veiling remains a dominant topic and concern in Islamic discourse and religious institutions (Odeh, 1993, 2010). It is

considered as a political sign that is associated with nationalism discourses, modernisms and the backwardness of Arab countries (Hijab, 1988; Taraki, 1995). Therefore some Arab governments have made explicit legislation and regulation while others have used implicit cultural codification on and symbolisation of women's conditions in their countries (Odeh, 2010).

In Oman, there is no legal requirement for women's attire. However it seems that culture determines the appropriateness of the attire. It is explicitly coded but not implicitly stated. According to Al-Azri (2013), government rhetoric on women's condition oscillates between modernity, and religious and cultural discourses, which in turn has created confusion for Omani women on the 'appropriate' practices of their attire in public conduct (Chatty, 2000; Al-Azri, 2013).

In the literature on veiling, there are two main dominant views: traditionalist, that veiling is mandatory based on religious doctrine (e.g. Kandiyoti, 1991); and contemporary, that advocates the idea that veiling is a social custom that was practised in the pre-Islamic era (e.g. Ahmed, 1992). Within this latter group, scholars argue that veiling took different shapes and forms throughout history, and was used to signify different things in different periods (Mernissi, 1991).

The participants in my study held contradictory views: some believed that veiling is Islamic; others believed it is purely cultural; and some were left in doubt. Interestingly, the different views of veiling are also shared among Essers's sample's women (2009). However, in Essers's sample, women referred to Quranic verses and Hadith (prophet's sayings) to justify their

claims of practising not veiling, or veiling; unlike the women in my case, where veiling was a personal interpretation of Islam, without backing it up with evidence.

However, and despite this study's women's beliefs, the way they chose to appear affects their entrepreneur-ing, as is the case with Essers's study's women, despite in different ways. As demonstrated by my participants, wearing the headscarf in the cultural way meets the social expectation of society. In this regard, women gain respect and trust because they are veiled, even if it is not Islamic, but in the cultural fashion. Also, the government seems to support the women with the cultural headscarf fashion more than the Islamic ones or the liberal ones. It appears that the cultural fashion seems to represent the Omani women's modern cultural identity, which is supported and encouraged by the government; although this is not stated explicitly, it seems to be symbolically practised. According to some scholars on Oman, the Omani government seems to display more symbolic and implicitly codified cultural practices when it comes to the issue of women (Chatty, 2000). Also, Omani society seems to remain conservative when it comes to women's appearance and practices (Al-Bulushi, 2010) and there is a societal preference and tendency towards veiled women, more precisely, women veiled in the cultural fashion. To recap, cultural veiling is not fully covering the hair, and wearing coloured headscarves and dresses. Within Omani culture, according to the women participants, veiling in a cultural fashion seems to indicate trust and respect towards one's own culture.

For me as an Omani woman who has been in the public space for a while (through my work experience), the public discourse in Oman promotes that idea that the black Abaya is not Omani, and is imported. The evidence that is used to support this claim is that historically Omani women used to wear traditional colourful dresses with headscarves that do not cover

the full hair. Therefore, as an Omani, we should use colourful headscarves and dresses without black Abaya. The emphasis is on bringing our Omani traditional heritage with modern outfits and looks. However, we should remain veiled.

Within the religion/culture category, the last point to discuss is the idea of fatalism. Among most women in my sample, fatalism stood as a strong belief that seems to shape the doing of entrepreneur-ing; and again I cannot claim it is purely religious or cultural; also I cannot suggest it is gendered, as it could be shared by both sexes.

From a religious point of view, according to Pistrui and Fahed-Sreih (2010), the culture in the Middle East is inclined towards fatalism, and Allah (God) is usually used to explain uncertainty in life. In this regard, Ramadani et al. (2015) argue that decision making within Islamic belief requires depending on Allah.

However, from a cultural point of view, Clift and Helani (2010) analysed from the linguistic point of view the religious expression 'Inshallah' that is used by Arabs despite their religious affiliations. This expression means 'God willing', and represents the idea of invocation to God that is usually used among Arabs for hopes and wishes in the future irrespective of their religious affiliation. The point to make is that the ideology of fatalism might be cultural enhanced by religious thoughts, or vice versa.

However, the notion of fatalism stands in contrast to one of the strongest character traits that is identified in the Western literature (e.g. Shapero, 1975; Ajzen, 2002; Burns, 2014). Reviewing the Western mainstream literature has that identified locus of control stands as one of the main characteristics of an entrepreneur (Gartner, 1985). The mainstream literature of entrepreneurship theory and practice has promoted the idea of the strong desire and belief

that entrepreneurs hold for internal locus of control. Locus of control is the degree individuals believe that they can control the world around them. In contrast to the external locus of control which is a belief that an individual's success is affected by forces outside their control (e.g. Shapero, 1975; Ajzen, 2002). Thus, women entrepreneurs in my study most likely will be considered un-entrepreneurial in the Western sense. Although my sample is not representative and I do not seek generalisation, this assumption of being un-entrepreneurial in the Western sense resonates with the claim made in a recent PhD that framed the Omani culture as un-entrepreneurial, which is addressed as a challenge for the Omani authority to promote entrepreneurship (Al-Mataani, 2017).

To conclude this chapter, I would like to support the claims made in Essers's work. This work contributes to and adds mainly to Essers's work (2009), in which she studied Muslim migrant societies in the Netherlands. First and foremost, Essers, among others (e.g. Smith, 1980; Ahmed, 1992; Bernard, 1994) argues that Islam cannot be tied to one culture or society. Islam has different interpretations and sects among Muslims themselves, and there is no such thing as one Islam. However, these interpretations can be captured in the practices of believers; these embody believers' cultural meanings and social norms. Also, the contextual, structural and situational arrangements in a given time and space play a role in shaping those practices. For example, women in Essers's sample shared the idea of individuality of faith, and relied on their knowledge to re-interpret Islam in a way that fits their contemporary lives in a secular country like the Netherlands; there their religious affiliation might have taken its toll on them and affected their lives, given the related issue of Islamphobia. The women in my sample live in their home Muslim country where being Muslim is the norm. As a result, Islam plays different roles in their lives, and breaking free from religious affiliation might cause an issue

(e.g. unveiling). Also, the public discourse of the government in Oman supports the modest/modern Islam that has encouraged the cultural veiling fashion that is practised in Omani society, which also has created a pressure and constraint for women who veil for religious purposes, and for women who unveil. This evidence supports the following two claims: first, Muslim women do not all share the same issues and concerns in entrepreneurship. Second, women's issues in Arab countries is a political matter.

The next chapter concludes the meanings of entrepreneurship and the contextual influences that shaped the doings of entrepreneur-ing according to these women who are currently involved in the act of entrepreneurship.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Earlier I argued that the notion of entrepreneurship that is most generally propagated in the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship theory and practice is inadequate to represent and make sense of women's entrepreneurship experience in Oman. Therefore, more work needs to be done to explore the meanings and the realities of women's entrepreneurship in local contexts. In alignment with contemporary critical writers on entrepreneurship such as Steyaert (2007) and Essers (2009) who treat entrepreneurship as a social construct and advocate theorising through localising and contextualising entrepreneurship knowledge, I have undertaken to do this through life-story interviews with a small group of women currently involved in entrepreneur-ing activities. In order to shed more light on the ways in which entrepreneurship and entrepreneur-ing is understood and practised by these women entrepreneurs in Oman, I have explored this through a narrative approach and focused on the two aspects highlighted in my research questions:

1. How do Omani women conceptualise entrepreneurship?
2. How do Omani women narrativise their entrepreneurial practices and what do these narratives suggest about the ways they understand and make sense of the context in which they work?

The first question aimed to explore the meanings and associations that Omani women entrepreneurs ascribe to the notion; and the second question aimed to identify the perceived contextual influences that shaped their doings of entrepreneurial practices. Therefore, the

two areas I focused on are conceptualising and contextualising the notion of entrepreneurship in the Omani context. In this section, I highlight specifically those areas that are not recognised in the mainstream literature, in the three studies on Oman, and the few more on the Gulf states. I also highlight the areas that have been recognised but play out in different ways in the Omani context; and finally I highlight the areas that seem to fundamentally challenge the propagated Western conception of entrepreneurship.

To start with, this thesis has demonstrated that the notion of entrepreneurship is a fluid concept that takes different shapes and forms in relation to time and space. It is influenced by the linguistic resources available to individuals, infused by their educational background, and shaped by different contextual forces such as politics, culture and religion. As the analysis in this thesis showed, the views expressed by my participants are sometimes inconsistent, overlapping, confused and contradictory about what entrepreneurship is; which reinforces the idea that the concept is new and still evolving and developing.

Unlike in the West, the notion of entrepreneurship is fairly new in the Arab world and in Oman more specifically. Entrepreneurship has been promoted to Arab governments by international organisations and consultancy bodies as a silver bullet that will solve the economic problems and the increasing unemployment issues. Governments in the Arab world including Oman adopted entrepreneurship and started to apply entrepreneurship programmes to solve their problems (Ennis, 2015).

Therefore, as the analysis showed, the term is becoming associated with the government, more precisely the government support. The support offered by the government after 2013 is a strong drive that encouraged women to become entrepreneurs. Twenty-three of the

participants had previous, respected jobs. Seventeen were moonlighting on the side of their jobs, but became full-time entrepreneurs after 2013 due to the support offered by the government. Thus, entrepreneurship is evolving around the idea of governmental support.

To my participants, this government support is perceived as a result of HM's call for entrepreneurship. HM's own interest and encouragement has directed the government's focus on entrepreneurship and stimulated different organisations and political leaders to support entrepreneurship in the Omani market. For example: *"…if HM did not conduct the symposium, if there was no royal decree, no one would ever care…"* [IA], and *"…if you noticed that the whole wave of entrepreneurship happened only when HM spoke about it…"* [BH]. As the analysis suggests, the change in Oman is rather a top-down model that stems from the leadership, and the government, unlike the propagated Western bottom-up model, where individuals play a role in challenging and negotiating change of normative behaviour from their individualistic positions (West and Zimmerman, 1987, 2009). Also, this is unlike how entrepreneurs are depicted in the mainstream literature of classic entrepreneurship, where entrepreneurs are described as individuals who make the change in the economy, take control and are in charge of their own destiny (e.g. Burns, 2014). As seen in the results chapter, the government interventions seem to be strong in setting and shaping the possibilities and the opportunities for entrepreneurs in the Omani market, especially for women. Hence, as evidenced in the quotes, women entrepreneurs are aware of the government's role and style, and negotiated their entrepreneurship within this top-down model.

However, the term is perceived as new but not the activity; for example, *"…the recognition of the term was not received until HM brought it into the light… It was business and now it*

became entrepreneur[ship]*, same concept new term…"* [HL]. My analysis showed that my participants believed that the newness is only in the term, with no major difference in the activity. This could be one of the main reasons why women's entrepreneurship in Oman is culturally and socially accepted. The results of my study showed that there are no major social or cultural resistances towards entrepreneurship for Omani women per se.

Primarily, women's entrepreneurship is perceived as equivalent to traditional home-business trading; for example, *"… women were doing business at home but they didn't have the capabilities to come out* [become visible]*… but after PASMED and Rafad* [Rafad is the funding government entity]*, these women came out…"* [NH]. This example among others offered in the results chapter proves the idea that women's entrepreneurship in Oman is becoming equivalent to traditional home-business. According to some participants, government support had focused on the traditional home-business which shaped the early perception and associations of what entrepreneurship is or could be. Women from Arab tribes and mostly from the interior saw no difference in the activity; for example, *"these categories don't make a difference… no difference between businesswoman, women entrepreneur or trader…"* [RM]. Whereas women with Western education and from ethnic groups/tribes in Muscat held different views, but stated that Omani society and the government perceive women's entrepreneurship in traditional home-business and in women's sectors; for example, "... *Omani women doing entrepreneur is like selling… they are selling bukhoor and abaya* [incense and traditional women wear/domestic goods]*..."* [HL].

Thus, entrepreneurship is not perceived as a profession, nor professional; for example, *"... women entrepreneur are... much more in the home business, Abaya* [traditional woman wear] *bukhoor* [incense] *dates and cakes, and I feel the woman who is... outside these categories,*

they became misunderstood" [NM], and to clarify, "... *when you say you are an entrepreneur; they ask you what do you do? They expect you to sell… women in Oman have a potential career in entrepreneurship but the market does not accept nor understand what entrepreneurship is"* [HL]. The understandings of the notion seem to be evolving around home-business and domestic goods, and not associated with professionalism. Within my sample, there were only four who made their profession as an entrepreneurship; three came from the same ethnic group/tribe from Muscat with Western education; and one is from the interior with local education; while the majority of women have found their entrepreneurship in their hobby or interest. Some still run their business in their home.

Unlike how the entrepreneurship definition is propagated in the mainstream literature, entrepreneurship is not primarily associated with monetary outcomes for most of the participants. Expanding on the idea of hobby-related entrepreneurship, the majority of women were not necessity driven, and entrepreneurship is treated as an extra income. Only three associated entrepreneurship with monetary outcomes; and again, two of these three come from the same ethnic group/tribe from Muscat with Western education; the other woman is divorced with children and comes from one of the Arab tribes from the interior and holds a local education.

Also, none of the 29 women entrepreneurs in my sample were job-seekers. On the contrary, most had a respected career. The rest were either housewives with established husband, or women retired from previous, respected jobs. They also come from relatively financially stable backgrounds, living with their families and have support of domestic labour for household chores. In this regard, most women reported having free time (housewives and retired specifically) that they have occupied with hobby-related entrepreneurship.

Interestingly, the idea that Omani women are driven by their hobby in business was reported in previous studies a decade ago (Al-Riyami et al., 2002; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). The (historical) tendency of Omani women towards hobby-related entrepreneurship might have also played a role in reinforcing the gender stereotype of traditional/domestic home-business leaving little or no room for professionalism or new perspective.

In contrast with the literature, entrepreneurship is perceived as gender-neutral despite the norm being linguistically superficially gendered. This reflects the Western idea of the dominant norm in language that is taken for granted (e.g. Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009). The gender-neutral perception seems to stem from the sex-segregated mind-set and societies. Sex-segregated societies open different possibilities and opportunities for Omani women in entrepreneurship and other occupations alike. In sex-segregated societies, women are expected to work in any occupation. This could be one of the explanations why women did not see or describe jobs in gendered character traits; or do not see the gender differences as perceived in the West: "*… whether you are a woman or a man, it makes no difference…"* [BH]. The idea of character traits associated with certain occupations has not been expressed by my participants; and the idea that women and men are the same in entrepreneurship has been expressed widely by my participants. However, in other ways they demonstrated that being women involves specific challenges and constraints. Thus, even though they say entrepreneurship is gender-neutral and see it as such, it is highly gendered in Oman.

Interestingly, the tendency towards sex-segregation in Muslim communities has shaped how women do entrepreneur-ing in different ways. As seen in my results, it opens different possibilities for women to serve women only; while for the Muslim women entrepreneurs in Essers's sample (2009) where mixing is the norm in the Netherlands, some of these women

have strategised sex-segregation preference by offering women-only service for their communities. However, the women in Essers's study described entrepreneurship in terms of Western masculine character traits, while women in my study did not see it the same way.

The understandings of entrepreneurship as reported by the 29 participants differ in key ways to that which is reported in the literature of the classic theory of entrepreneurship. However, the different understandings and the new insights of entrepreneurship evidenced in my study fall under the claims made by critical theorists of entrepreneurship (e.g. Ogbor, 2000; Calas et al., 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013) and the contemporary perspectives of theorising through localising and contextualising entrepreneurship knowledge (e.g. Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Steyaert, 2007).

In order to understand these key differences, I turn to the perceived contextual influences that shaped the doings of the notion in the Omani context. These contextual influences are either not identified in the mainstream literature or are identified but in different ways. These perceived key contextual influences are both liberating and constraining for Omani women entrepreneurs, but not in the same way that has been identified in the literature.

First and foremost, the first key contextual influence is tribalism. Tribalism does not exist in the Western literature nor in the limited literature on Arab Muslim women. As the analysis showed, the tribe's reputation shapes the societal expectation of who can or cannot be an entrepreneur; for example, *"I guess if I was from another tribe, things would have been easier…"* [MA]. This example and others were expressed by women from conservative tribes mainly in the interior regions in Oman, as the perceived impact of the tribes seems to be stronger on them. Meanwhile women from ethnic groups/tribes placed less emphasis on

tribalism as a struggle, but acknowledged it when asked, and believed that they are socially accepted because of as their tribe's reputation. As the analysis showed, tribalism seems to overshadow gender, qualification and business activity. Women's entrepreneur-ings are within their tribal name; where business deals and clients' network were approached from the tribalism perspective.

The second perceived contextual influence is the government. Picking up on the idea of a top-down model of change in Oman, and the rentier mentality of the government with its paternalistic style, the government seems to control and shape how women become and practise entrepreneurship. As evidenced, the examples that are mentioned in the results chapter are such as *"... they have adopted me..."* [NM] and *"... we are spoiled like children..."* [SI]. The supported women described the way government treats them in family metaphors, which implies a parenting style in shaping women's entrepreneurship in Oman. This parenting style seems to shape the possibilities and the opportunities, also with dependence behaviour of rentierism, which in turn seem to shape women's entrepreneurial practices. As demonstrated, women are maintaining this parent–child relationship, which seems to enhance the dependency behaviour.

As some stories evidenced, women had to establish relationships with the government as they faced difficulties in their attempt to stand alone in the market. As perceived, deals and contracts are mainly conducted through the government on one hand, and the governmental procedures are eased off for the women under government patronage on the other; as stated by [IA] *"...I have reached one conclusion that it is all about relationships and not qualifications..."*.

Also, as reported by some of my participants, the government has made women entrepreneurs visible in Omani society through media channels and participation in regional and international events. Women entrepreneurs have become very visible in Omani society, and are celebrated in different platforms. However, the government seems to publicise and encourage women who mostly dress up in a cultural headscarf, with less public attention given to the ones with Islamic or liberal images. This kind of publicity created certain issues with women who would like to keep their Islamic or liberal image. Women from the interior rejected the promoted image of the Omani women entrepreneur that is supported by the government and propagated in the media. These women kept their traditional Islamic image, unlike women from Muscat where they negotiated their image to align with the culturally modern image the government is supporting.

Also, and on top of the government's attention that seems to focus on the traditional women, they also have focused on women's business that embodies national symbolism; which in turn perpetuated the gendered stereotype of domestic women's business on one hand, and limited the possibilities of new or professional ideas that are national-symbolism free on the other.

The third significant perceived key contextual influence is family. Although this factor has been acknowledged and addressed in the Western context and the literature on Arab women entrepreneurs (e.g. Madichie and Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014; Naguib and Jamali, 2015), the way family influences matters, as shown in this study, is fundamentally different. One of the key differences is that women in my sample had domestic labour that freed them from household chores; which is not the case for women entrepreneurs in the Western context nor Muslim women elsewhere (e.g. Essers, 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), as identified

in the literature where the emphasis is more often on the challenges of balancing the competing demands of work and domestic responsibilities, and work-life balance (e.g. Nel et al., 2010; Chasserio et al., 2014). However, the social obligations in Omani women's lives create different forms of pressure such as the social obligations of familial obedience, marriage and giving birth; also women's private space at home remain valued and preferred (Fakhro, 2005; Itani et al., 2011; Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

Also, family are involved heavily in women's entrepreneurship, especially if it is in sex-mixed environments. As the results showed, 'the shadow of a male figure' places emphasis on the gender roles of the male figure in the family. Although these businesses are not considered family businesses, the involvement of the male figure in women's entrepreneurship seems to be by default and vital in gender roles and obligations among family members, for example, *"... I bring all my brothers with me... sometimes, even my male cousins..."* [RM], which indicates that men and women do entrepreneur-ing differently.

Therefore, family permission and consent seem to be significant in Omani women's entrepreneurship. One of the reasons might be the need for male relative support and the involvement in carrying entrepreneurship; for example, *"... they have very strong relationship with their parents... I think that's one of the key factors..."* [FB]. None of my participants reported standing against family will, or reported strong resistance from family. Although some women, especially the highly educated ones, expressed that their family were not fully convinced about them leaving their career. However, the analysis showed that families supported their daughters, brothers supporting their sisters and husbands supported their wives in entrepreneurship in Oman. Family support in this regard is crucial and embodied mainly in male relative involvement.

The final key perceived contextual influence is religion/culture. In broader terms, the 29 women entrepreneurs perceived Islam as a positive influence in their lives; and the example of Khadija is perceived as an encouragement for women to become entrepreneurs. One implication of the references to Khadija may be to make direct connection between entrepreneurship and Islam. This might be one of the explanations why women's entrepreneurship is socially and culturally accepted.

The second point that seems to be sensitive under religion/culture is women's attire, and this seems to be salient in the Omani society. As discussed in the literature, there are great debates around the practices of Hijab, and whether it is primarily Islamic or represents Arabic culture; this debate is reflected in my data. Apart from the involvement of the government for encouraging certain cultural images, the analysis of my study showed that women's attire is judged by society and affects their entrepreneurship; for example, *"… if I take my scarf off in public, I will be perceived as trying to seduce… or I have hidden agenda that I want to achieve through men… that's why I am still wearing my headscarf…"* [MH]. Some of the participants reported that wearing headscarf or Hijab increases social trustworthiness and acceptance; and also that it has a direct impact on their business, for example, *"… they don't trust you… they think you can do anything"* [MH]. Therefore, the liberal women among my participants wear a headscarf in their official public appearances, but not in their private lives, and try to keep the balance between the two spaces. As the results showed, the two main reasons are: first, to gain government's support, and second, to gain public trustworthiness and social acceptance. Whereas women wearing Hijab for religious reasons did not report issues with society, however some struggle with the government, as the government seems to promote the modern cultural Hijab for Omani women and is less keen on publicising the

religious image. Despite the limited sample of my study, the analysis showed that women's attire seems to be significant and sensitive issue in Omani society. The way women decide to wear their Hijab and how to appear affects how they carry entrepreneurship, and shapes the social expectations placed on them. The social expectations of how women appear shaped by how they make their choices in regard to their appearance. The range of views expressed by my respondents included women who believed that Hijab is cultural, and others who believed it is religious. However, the women who believe that it is cultural are constrained by societal expectations of how a 'good woman' should appear and conduct herself in public.

In contrast to the Western literature, the notion of fatalism appeared among almost all the 29 participants in different shapes and forms. Fatalism contradicts fundamentally the idea of locus of control that is addressed and emphasised in the mainstream literature of entrepreneurship as one of the most dominating character traits an entrepreneur has (e.g. Burns, 2014; Gartner, 1985). In this regard, Burns (2014) states that entrepreneurs might believe in luck, but not fate. The notion of fatalism might fall within the religious and cultural lines and it is almost impossible to separate them. Although this claim cannot be generalised, however, the analysis of my results showed fatalism plays a vital role in the understanding and practising of entrepreneurship in different ways, according to my participants.

The significance of this study is that it included different settings, such as a range of women from different regions and backgrounds, HM, tribalism, governments and women from different sects of Islam. The contribution to knowledge of this study lies in the new insights into Omani society about how entrepreneurship is understood, and identified the perceived key contextual influences that shaped the practices of the notion. These key factors carry

possibilities and constraints, but not in the same way as recognised in the mainstream literature.

My thesis contributes mainly to the work of Essers (2009) in the growing body of the critical entrepreneurship field. My thesis brings to the fore the different women's entrepreneurial practices of another Muslim country, namely Oman. To begin with, my thesis supports the claims made by Essers that there are different interpretations of Islam and Islam cannot be tied to one community or culture. In this regard, my results demonstrate that Islam is positioned, used and interpreted differently among Muslims, depending on context, culture, situation and researcher's position; which all contributed in constructing the knowledge produced. First and foremast, me being an Omani Muslim woman has shaped the issues and the interview discussions; in a way different to Essers who was a Dutch, white and non-Muslim woman. Second, context, where some issues highlighted in my thesis as context-specific such as tribalism, are not shared by Muslim communities elsewhere. Third, Islam: both samples (Essers and mine) are Muslim communities; however, the role of the context, culture and situation (Muslim/home country vs. Western/host country, migrants vs. nationals) has significantly shaped their entrepreneurial practices; for example, the interpretation, usage and positioning of Islam. In my thesis, Islam did not come up naturally in my interviews unless asked; whereas Islamic identity is salient among Muslim migrants as it distinguishes them from the Dutch society, especially with their gender and ethnicity. Also, while fatalism played a role in Omani women's entrepreneurial practices, it seems it is less of importance for the Moroccan and Turkish migrant entrepreneurs.

Also, the importance of attire: which although it seems to be important among all Muslim women in my study and Essers's studies, the practices and the impact of attire appear to play

out differently in these contexts. The pressure, associations and practices of attire for my women are not shared among migrant Muslim. The political, cultural and social pressure of attire as experienced among women in a Muslim country, and Muslim women in a secular country fundamentally differs.

Even the usage of Khadija's narrative varies, where it is mostly used with Essers's sample as a source of legitimacy of their entrepreneurship; in my sample, Khadija's narrative is used as an evidence of women's rights to work in Islam. Explicitly, the importance and the role of Islam seems to be more prominent among Muslim women in the Netherlands; the usage of Quranic verses and Hadith as guidance and supporting evidence might imply the importance of religious justification and legitimacy among migrant Muslim women; while Muslim women in their own Muslim country did not use supportive Islamic evidences apart from Khadija's narrative. It appears to me that migrant Muslim women need to justify themselves within Dutch society, perhaps therefore they need to educate themselves. In contrast, in a Muslim country, religious justification and affiliation does not seem to be an issue; where practising Islam explicitly is the social norm. On the contrary, an Omani expressing and practising secular behaviour might experience a struggle (unveiling, not-praying, not-fasting).

Thus, my thesis in turn supports the debate that the interpretation of Islam differs among different Muslim communities/cultures and cannot be tied to one Islam or one culture (e.g. Ahmed, 1992; Bernard, 1994; Omair, 2008; Essers, 2009) and therefore, entrepreneurial practices are rather situational, contextual and cultural (Essers, 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). Also, and despite women's issues in the Arab world being considered similar (Sidani, 2016), my thesis demonstrates that Arab/Muslim women do not share the same conditions and issues in entrepreneurship, and therefore their entrepreneurial practices are rather

shaped by their local culture, different interpretation of Islam and country politics (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010).

Also, I contribute to the contemporary studies of entrepreneurship of theorising through localising knowledge (e.g. Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Fletcher, 2007; Steyaert, 2007). My results suggest that entrepreneurship has different associations that are context-specific and have not been addressed in entrepreneurship literature. Although my results showed that the meanings of entrepreneurship are rather confused and contradictory among my participants, which supports the newness of the concept (Hattab, 2012; Ennis, 2015), the associations that are mentioned differ fundamentally from the Western associations of entrepreneurship. In this regard, one of the main contributions is the linguistic resources that are available to individuals (e.g. Steyaert, 1997, 2007). The Arabic version of the term entrepreneurship is associated with areas of leadership and pioneering; which in turn framed –to a large extent – how entrepreneurship is conceptualised locally. In this regard, my thesis supports theorising through localising and contextualising entrepreneurship knowledge.

Overall, this study has proven that entrepreneurship is a fluid and a changing concept that takes different shapes and forms in given times and spaces across different cultures and groups. Also, the analysis of the results showed that Omani society is changing; with women being seen in the public space, recognised and encouraged as entrepreneurs. Although there are social expectations of and practices specific to women entrepreneurs, my participants were aware of their condition and negotiated their position and entrepreneur-ing accordingly. Despite the change being a top-down model, my participants took advantage of what is available to them. Women are entrepreneur-ing within the perceived contextual

influences in their life such as tribalism, political leader, government, family involvement and meeting social expectations as an entrepreneur.

Finally, exploring the understandings of meanings and practices of a notion within a perceived context through social constructed narratives has helped me to construct the notion from different insights and angles. It broadens my horizon in exploring the meanings that these women held about entrepreneurship and the contextual influences that shaped the meanings and the experiences of doing entrepreneurship. The analysis of my results suggests that the combination of these two aspects is beneficial to explore and study meaning-making of different notions across different contexts.

7.1 Research Limitations

The main limitation of this study derives from its relatively small sample size and particular focus on certain groups and a single country. However, the value of this research stems from the rich narratives that I have captured and the significant effort I have made to consolidate the results for the Western academic audience and territory. My intention has not been to generalise from the results to broader Omani contexts, nor to the general Arab context, but to highlight the subjective interpretation of an experience and the understanding of Omani women entrepreneurs who registered themselves as an entrepreneur with PASMED. The insights that I have brought to the foreground enrich the existing field of critical entrepreneurship studies and contemporary entrepreneurship studies.

However, the insights offered in this study might only represent the women participants of my study. Meaning, there might be other Omani women entrepreneurs who hold different views and experiences, but I have not reached them, for example, about the financial aspect

of entrepreneurship; therefore, even within Oman, the results of this study are limited fairly to my participants. This warrants further exploration for other possible views and practices among Omani women entrepreneurs. Most of the women in my study are highly visible and supported by the government. There might be other women who are not visible and are registered as entrepreneurs. Also, further exploration needs to include women who did not register themselves as entrepreneurs and only as businesswomen. The differences between these two groups require further study.

The second limitation is ethical concerns about confidentiality. As mentioned earlier in the reflexivity section, the Omani market is relatively small and we almost all know each other or of each other. Women in the public space get quick recognition, and in order to keep confidentiality and anonymity, I have strong ethical obligations and I was thus limited in my writing about my participants, and accordingly the claims I am making in my study.

The third limitation is my position as an insider – in some aspects – which allows me to gain some insights and notice unexplored experiences. However, an outsider will spot different aspects in my study that are my blind spots and taken for granted by me. Thus, being an insider opens up possibilities for nuanced and unspotted experiences; nevertheless, they might constrain my ability to spot some of them.

The final limitation of this study is the research method I have used in this study. If I had to do this study again, I would have included ethnographic methods to complement the interviews. Applying one research method has it is advantages such as in-depth insights and delving into one's experience, however it is limited.

The other possibility to approach this kind of study is discourse analysis by using secondary official reports and published documents: to explore how Omani women are positioned in the public space, and whether Omani women see themselves positioned in certain ways; and accordingly, how that influences their understandings and shapes/re-shapes their doings in Oman.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Ethics Scrutiny

UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

Research Ethics Scrutiny (Annex to RS1 form)

SECTION A To be completed by the candidate

Registration No: 1329073

Candidate: Hadil Al Moosa

Degree of: MPhil with the possibly of transfer to PhD

Research Institute: BMRI

Research Topic: **"Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice for Women in the Middle East: The Role of Gender, Islam and Social Identity"**

External Funding: None

The candidate is required to summarise in the box below the ethical issues involved in the research proposal and how they will be addressed. In any proposal involving human participants the following should be provided:

- clear explanation of how informed consent will be obtained,
- how will confidentiality and anonymity be observed,
- how will the nature of the research, its purpose and the means of dissemination of the outcomes be communicated to participants,
- how personal data will be stored and secured
- if participants are being placed under any form of stress (physical or mental) identify what steps are being taken to minimise risk

If protocols are being used that have already received University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) ethical approval then please specify. Roles of any collaborating institutions should be clearly identified. Reference should be made to the appropriate professional body code of practice.

Participants will be women entrepreneurs living and running their businesses in the Middle East. They will be interviewed face to face by me as the researcher. An assurance of confidentiality will be given. Though their actual names will be recorded but will not be disclosed in the results or any publications. Only the demographics will be disclosed without mentioning their names. The participants will not be under any physical or mental stress. The questions will be related to their career choice and the influence of their religion, gender roles, and social identity.

The responses will be taped, transcribed and stored on personal computer with a back-up for some time until the thesis is completed and will be accessible only to me with a username and password. Once downloaded, the data will be stored in my password protected laptop and any printed data will be kept in my secure locker. The data will be destroyed upon completion of my degree.

Answer the following question by deleting as appropriate:

1. Does the study involve vulnerable participants or those unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, your own students)?
   No

   If **YES**: Have/will Researchers be CRB checked?
   No

2. Will the study require permission of a gatekeeper for access to participants (e.g. schools, self-help groups, residential homes)?
   No

3. Will it be necessary for participants to be involved without consent (e.g. covert observation in non-public places)?
   No

4. Will the study involve sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, substance abuse)?
   No

5. Will blood or tissue samples be taken from participants?
   No

6. Will the research involve intrusive interventions (e.g. drugs, hypnosis, physical exercise)?
   No

7. Will financial or other inducements be offered to participants (except reasonable expenses)?
   No

8. Will the research investigate any aspect of illegal activity?
   No

9. Will participants be stressed beyond what is normal for them?
   No

10. Will the study involve participants from the NHS (e.g. patients) or participants who fall under the requirements of the Mental Capacity Act 2005?

No

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions or if you consider that there are other significant ethical issues then details should be included in your summary above. If you have answered yes to Question 1 then a clear justification for the importance of the research must be provided.

*Please note if the answer to Question 10 is yes then the proposal should be submitted through **NHS research ethics approval procedures** to the appropriate **NRES**. The UREC should be informed of the outcome.

Checklist of documents which should be included:

Project proposal (with details of methodology) & source of funding	Yes
Documentation seeking informed consent (if appropriate)	No
Information sheet for participants (if appropriate)	No
Questionnaire (if appropriate)	No

(Tick as appropriate)

Signature of Applicant: Date: 31/05/2014

Signature of Director of Studies: Date: 31/05/2014

This form together with a copy of the research proposal should be submitted to the Research Institute Director for consideration by the Research Institute Ethics Committee/Panel

Note you cannot commence collection of research data until this form has been approved

SECTION B To be completed by the Research Institute Ethics Committee:

Comments:

Approved

Signature Chair of Research Institute Ethics Committee:

Date:

This form should then be filed with the RS1 form

If in the judgement of the committee there are significant ethical issues for which there is not agreed practice then further ethical consideration is required before approval can be given and

the proposal with the committees comments should be forwarded to the secretary of the UREC for consideration.

There are significant ethical issues which require further guidance

Signature Chair of Research Institute Ethics Committee:

Date:

This form together with the recommendation and a copy of the research proposal should then be submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Interview Map

Key points

1. Tell me your story
2. / tell me about yourself/ tell me about your business
3. How did the idea came to mind (the start idea/business)
4. What influenced your choice (motives) / how did you make the decision/ when did you make your (religion, gender, tribalism, professionalism)
5. Consultation, did you consult anyone? Who? And why?
6. Main incidents/ turning points (why? How did they react?)
7. What does entrepreneurship mean?
8. What do you think of women's entrepreneurs in Oman
9. What does it mean to you? as what (listen)
10. How is it like? Examples
11. Main incidents (turning point)
12. How did your life changed
13. Who do you owe her success to
14. How do you describe/ identify yourself? And why?
15. Life stage graph (drawing)
16. Metaphor describing your self
17. (closing question) according to some research, the reasons for the underdevelopment condition for Arab countries is women's condition, and it is attributed to Islam (Hatem, 1993; El Saadawi, 2007).

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Consent form

Title of study:

Women's Entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman

Researcher:

Hadil Al-Moosa

PhD candidate

Department of Management and Business Systems

University of Bedforshire

hadil.al-moosa@study.beds.ac.uk

Supervision:

Dr Christina Schwabenland
Reader in Public and Voluntary Sector Management
Director: Centre for Leadership Innovation
Department of Management and Business Systems
University of Bedfordshire

Purpose:

This research seeks to explore the experience of women's entrepreneurship in a non-Western context, specifically in the Middle Eastern Sultanate of Oman. This study is part of a PhD project.

Procedures:

If you choose to become involved in this study, you will be asked semi- structured and open-ended questions regarding your story and experience in entrepreneurship. The interview will be recorded. Data will be held and used by the researcher.

Amount of time required:

60 – 120 Minutes for one to one interview. There might be follow up interview for further clarification if required.

Rights:

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary, you can refuse to answer any of the questions or withdraw at any stage of this research

Confidentiality:

To ensure confidentiality, this research will apply nicknames to protect identities, analysing process will be under taken by the researcher. The data will be erased after the PhD project is completed

Consent form:

I have read the consent form and recognise that my participation in this study is totally voluntary and that I'm free to withdraw at any time during the course of the study without consequence. I understand that information resulting from this study will be strictly confidential. I realise that I may ask for further information about this study if required to do so at any time

I agree to participate in this study

Subject Signature: Date:

---------- ----------

Appendix 4: Basic Participant Information

Basic information

1	Name/ initials	
2	Gender	
3	Material status	
4	No. of children	
5	Educational background and year	
6	Years of experience (previously)	
7	Position held in previous job	
8	Years of experience (entrepreneurship)	
9	Sector of previous job	
10	Sector of business	
11	Do you have a business partner? Relationship	
12	Did you get any support from the government? If yes, specify	
13	Is it your first business project? If not, please specify	
14	Are the only breadwinner in the family?	
15	Are you financially supporting family or relatives?	
16	Do you have another source of income?	
17	Do you depend on other sources of income?	
18	Do you live alone or with family?	

Appendix 5: Interview Guide

Interview guide addressing macro-, meso- and micro-level factors, developed from Jamali (2009)

		Normative institution	
Level		**Dimension**	**Description**
Macro	National	Societal and structural patterns	The most dominant contextual factors in shaping the notion
Meso	Groups and organizations	Relationships and practices within the hierarchy of an organizational context, between individuals and between groups	Society's perceptions and reactions and the dynamics of social practices
Micro	Individuals	Motivation, agency	The reason behind the decision and the form of agency exhibited

Jamali, D. (2009) Constraints and Opportunities Facing Women Entrepreneurs in Developing Countries: A Relational Perspective, *Gender in Management: An International Journal,* 24**(**4) pp.232-251